

PCZONE

THE FIRST AND BEST PC GAMES MAGAZINE ISSUE 125 FEBRUARY 2003

SPLINTER CELL

**WORLD
EXCLUSIVE!**

MASSIVE 6-Page Review AND Playable Demo!

**DEFINITIVE
REVIEWS**

SIM CITY 4

**EVERQUEST:
THE PLANES OF POWER**

COMBAT FLIGHT SIM 3

CIVILIZATION 3: PLAY THE WORLD

PLUS...

**BATTLEFIELD 1942:
THE ROAD TO ROME**

VIETCONG

IRON 2.0

PLANETSIDE

**EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST
AND SCREENSHOTS!**

BLACK & WHITE 2

STOP PRESS!

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

**NEW SCREENSHOTS AND
SHOCKING NEWS FROM THE
WORLD'S BIGGEST GAME**

EXCLUSIVE SCREENSHOTS!

EVERQUEST 2

Online gaming has never looked so good

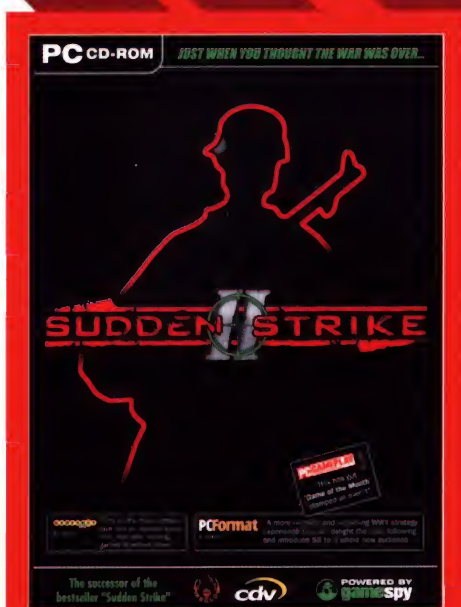
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TINY COMPO:
What's the name of
the character you
play in Splinter Cell?

VIRGIN LOVES



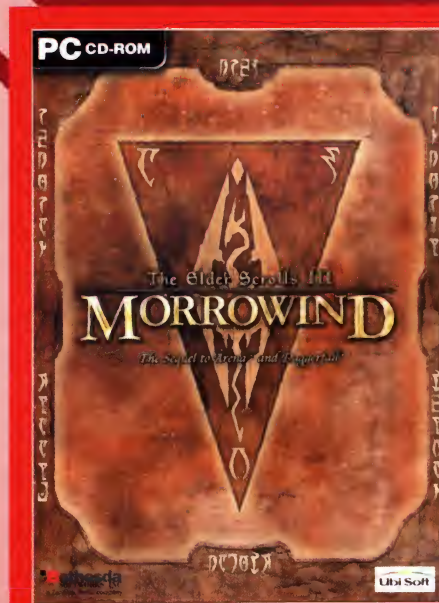
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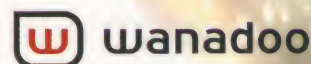
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SPLINTER CELL P62

It's finally here, the stealth/action shooter the world's been waiting for. Check out our massive world exclusive review and then play the demo.



Start 2003 with a bang

After months of dithering I finally got my act together to get a new PC for Christmas. The only trouble was that I was so excited (up at 6am and downstairs in my pyjamas) by my new boxes that I totally failed to heed any of the usual safety warnings you get from so-called experts. Especially the one about not plugging a kettle lead into the wall, turning the switch on and then plunging the pins into the back of a new set of surround speakers.

As soon as the pins made contact an appropriately seasonal shooting star erupted from the end of the lead, fizzed around in front of my eyes and would probably have killed me if I hadn't fallen over and shrieked like a little girl. After a few minutes I braved the box again, prodding it with a bit of wood to make sure it was safe. Which it was. Trouble is, it was also dead, and after enquiring I was told that "no, your warranty doesn't cover you for wanton acts of stupidity."

The moral of the story? Treat your PC with the respect it deserves, and don't fiddle around with it at some ungodly time of the morning with a stonking hangover. That's the first of my two New Year's Resolutions and I'm going to stick to it if I ever raise enough money to buy another set of Klipsch 5.1 speakers.

The only other one is to make sure that *PC ZONE* is packed with the biggest exclusives in 2003. We're kicking off with the world's first review of the game that just missed Christmas, *Splinter Cell*, but to compensate we've got the exclusive playable demo on our cover discs, along with seven other exclusive playable demos. Believe me, it's more fun than trying to give up smoking...

Dave Woods
Editor



PCZONE
ISSUE 125

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COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO P42

It's the exclusive everyone wanted but only we've got. Incredible new info and screenshots on the single-player version of the world's favourite online shooter. You can't afford to miss this one.



BLACK & WHITE 2 P38

Prepare to be stunned by this incredible sequel, and find out why it's looking like the next evolutionary step in strategy gaming in our huge exclusive preview.

COVER DISCS P116

■ 9 PLAYABLE DEMOS, 8 OF WHICH ARE EXCLUSIVE TO PC ZONE...

Splinter Cell, Vietcong, Neverwinter Nights, Praetorians, Black Hawk Down, Ultra Assault, MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries and Shadow Of Memories as well as the playable demo of Rainbow Six: Raven Shield multiplayer.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE

DVD-Video developer coverage from CCP Games, creators of Eve Online together with a Making Of documentary on James Bond 007: NightFire. 3 demos not on the CDs, including Impossible Creatures, Private Dancer and Lord Of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring. All the featured mods in ModWatch. For full DVD contents see the back of your DVD case.





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goes on sale Thursday February 6. Don't miss it!

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WIN!

THE COMPO NO ONE FINDS Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: The Compo No One Finds (125), PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing date: February 5 2003. The winner of our Christmas compo (123) is Mr Stewart Henderson. Well done.

**FIRST
Look!**

Italian battalions!

BATTLEFIELD 1942: THE ROAD TO ROME

Digital Illusions' engrossing WWII FPS receives new military orders

COMMANDER Jamie Sefton

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Digital Illusions

PUBLISHER EA Games

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q1 2003

WEBSITE www.battlefield1942.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Add-on pack for best multiplayer wargame of 2002
- Six huge new maps from the Italian WWII campaigns
- New weapons, vehicles and squads
- Includes single-player mode with improved AI

SOME DAY, all wars will be fought like this: virtual troops battling it out in a gruelling arena, taking control of powerful tanks on the ground, ships at sea and planes in the air, as well as yomping on foot with other online combatants. Digital Illusions' *Battlefield 1942* may have suffered in single-player due to poor AI and hurriedly assembled missions, but in multiplayer it delivered an incredibly immersing theatre of war with up to 64 PC gamers being able to join in the action.

The Road To Rome is an expansion pack for *Battlefield 1942* that concentrates on making the multiplayer WWII experience even better, conscripting players into the fierce fighting that took place during the Allies' Italian campaign. "When we looked at where we wanted to go with the expansion pack we finally came upon Italy, because some really heavy battles took place there," says producer Anders Hoh. "The war in Italy is not that widely known, which added some novelty value. Plus, it was also an appealing thought to add new

landscape scenery to the *Battlefield 1942* universe as well." You'll notice this immediately from playing the add-on pack, which shows beautifully-lit Mediterranean olive groves and distinctive architecture, which is used as cover for troops that now include the Italian infantry and French legionnaires.

FIELDS OF WAR

However, the biggest addition are the six new maps, which include the Sicily-based Operation Husky, and each area includes new rules of engagement that encourages gamers to play the existing multiplayer modes – such as CTF – very differently. "For instance," explains Hoh, "one of the maps is kind of a traditional King of the Hill level. When you reach the top, the teams can't spawn again, which will make this area very important to defend. If you lose it, you'll have to fight your way up the hill again to retake it. This also works well for single-player." Talking of which, Hoh and his team have been busy giving



Before...



...after.

the computer-controlled soldiers in *The Road To Rome* a right royal boot up the arse, which will hopefully improve the single-player experience, effectively creating unscripted battles that you can enjoy offline again and again.

Digital Illusions has also jemmied in eight more vehicles, ships and aircraft such as the British Mosquito twin-engine fighter bomber and an Italian torpedo boat. "Almost all of the new vehicles work differently," says Hoh. "The new British and German tanks have protected turret gunners, the aeroplanes are nice mixes between a bomber and a fighter

and we've included new stationary anti-tank guns." Although there aren't any new infantry classes in *The Road To Rome*, many have been given new weapons, such as a Sten-gun for the British and French medics, and deadly bayonets for all the engineers' rifles, meaning there'll be close combat with a new twist – so to speak. "I'm especially fond of the Italian assault gun, the Breda. It has a nice sound and feel to it when it blazes off," adds Hoh. We'll find out whether *Battlefield 1942: The Road To Rome* is worth invading once the fog of war has cleared in a future PC ZONE.



American Insignia on a Mosquito?





Even the Prime Minister's Tuscan villa puts in an appearance.

TICKETS

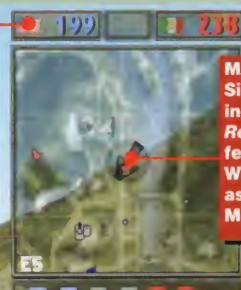
These are used to tell which side is winning or losing - if any of your units (planes, tanks, jeeps, ships, infantry etc) are destroyed you lose a ticket. If a side reaches zero tickets, they lose the battle.

TANKS

Players will have access to new British and German tanks, as well as a new collection of static anti-tank guns for taking them out.

BUILDINGS

The Italian setting of *The Road To Rome* has allowed Digital Illusions to produce brand new scenery and buildings in a distinctive and atmospheric Mediterranean style.



MAP

Six new maps are included in *The Road To Rome* that feature famous Italian WWII events such as the Battle for Monte Cassino.

PLANES

New aircraft include the German BF-110 and the British twin-engine Mosquito - a smart hybrid of a fighter and a bomber.

GRAPHICS

The 3D graphics promise to be as breathtaking as before, with *The Road To Rome* boasting the use of an enhanced Refractor 2 engine specially developed just for *Battlefield 1942*.

WEAPONS

There are two new infantry weapons in the expansion pack - an Italian assault gun called the Breda, and a British Sten submachine-gun. Engineers have had their knives replaced by bayonets on their rifles.

**FIRST
Look!**

Make mine a large...

PLAYTESTER
Martin Korda

BATTLE ENGINE AQUILA

Exclusive! The console version is getting rave reviews and now it's heading for the PC. We play the game no one else new existed

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Lost Toys
PUBLISHER TBA
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE TBA
WEBSITE www.losttoys.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Epic action-based battles with thousands of units on screen at once
- Branching storyline and mission-tree
- Stunning fully 3D levels
- Multiple strategies add massive re-playability factor



You're going down.

NASTY THING this global warming. After decades of people flavouring their sweat in a futile bid not to repulse the opposite sex and spewing noxious gasses into the atmosphere with their motorised phallus extensions – not to mention all the colourless gasses emitted after all those sneaky late-night vindaloos – the earth has been ravaged by near apocalyptic climate changes. At least that's the case in the futuristic world of *Battle Engine Aquila*, a thrilling action-shooter, which will be blazing its way to the PC some time later this year. And although a publisher is yet to be announced, developer Lost Toys is currently in negotiations with several key players in the PC market.

With the world almost entirely covered by water, two battling empires – the Forseti and the Muspell – are locked in a bloody conflict over what little land still remains, and despite an aggressive advertising campaign from Coca-Cola to try and restore harmony and love to mankind (while selling a few bottles of fizzy pop along the way), the two sides remain intent on wiping each other out. A bleak reality indeed, although I was, of course, only kidding about the Coke part. It's Pepsi actually.

Enter you, a cocky puss-faced teenager called Hawk (naturally) who spends his time racing hover-cars with his mates, and unwittingly honing his skills as a crack fighter pilot at the same time. Which is a stroke of luck as a similarly aesthetically-challenged, angst-ridden adolescent reprobate dubs you in to the authorities like a girly-little-swot. The army then identifies your hidden talents and throws

you into the frontline as the pilot of the most sophisticated piece of weaponry they possess – the Battle Engine Aquila. It could have been worse, you could have been peeling potatoes.

Before long, you're embroiled in an epic campaign, propelled forward by a branching mission tree and storyline that develop according to your successes and failures on the battlefield.

Half robot, half fighter, the Battle Engine is armed to the teeth with an array of lasers and missiles with which to decimate the enemy. I was fortunate



Shoot those men and watch them fly through the air.

enough to have an in-depth playtest of the PC version, which currently only runs at 640 x 480 resolution, but will be fully optimised over the coming months. While I was immersed in the frantic, yet subtly strategic action, it was clear that *BEA* is set to be as much of a hit on the PC as it's currently on the consoles. And here's why.

YES, HERE'S WHY...

The first thing that grabs your attention more violently than a lairy pissed-up Glaswegian on PCP is the sheer scope of the battles. As you fly your war machine around each level, dog-fighting endless droves of enemy fighters intent on felling your precious cargo ships, waves of enemy tanks spill out of their carriers like swarms of locusts, and bare down on your forces. The battle kicks off, AI against AI, with you and your war machine the wild card, capable of swaying a battle's outcome through your skill, or lack of it. But do you fight from the skies (with your lightly armoured fighter) or from the ground in your tank-like



Bang!

robot? The strategic decisions are, of course, solely yours.

The action is a pure adrenal-mix of quick-thinking and accurate shooting, a combination few other games have done justice to. Which is why we're already getting more than a little excited about the prospect of playing the final version.

Battle Engine Aquila is still several months off completion and of course an exact release date will rely on when a deal is struck with a publisher. But it's coming, be sure of that, and even at this stage, it's looking like being a massive hit in 2003. **EW**



Battles will be truly epic affairs.

"The first thing that grabs your attention more violently than a lairy pissed-up Glaswegian on PCP is the sheer scope of the battles"



The PC version currently runs at only 640 x 480, but over the coming months, Lost Toys will be optimising it to run at a much higher resolution.

BASE

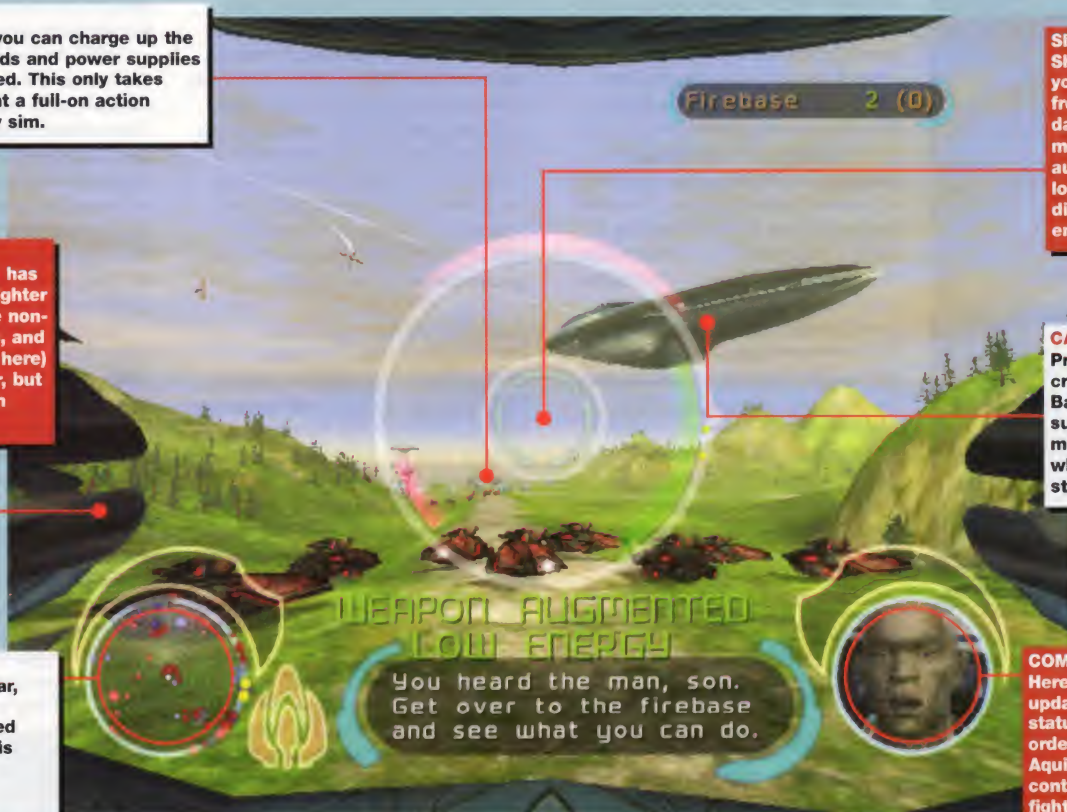
Your base is where you can charge up the Battle Engine's shields and power supplies when they're depleted. This only takes a second – Kuju want a full-on action game, not a strategy sim.

ROBOT MODE

Battle Engine Aquila has two modes: as the fighter you can fly, but have non-regenerating shields, and as the robot (shown here) you're much tougher, but have to fight it out in ground battles.

SCANNER

Shows the field of war, with all friendly and enemy units. You need to keep an eye on this to check that your cargo ships aren't being attacked.



SIGHT

Shows which direction you're being attacked from, glowing red for danger. In Fighter mode you have automatic laser lock-on for the fast dispatching of enemies.

CARGO SHIP

Protect these valuable craft with your Battle Engine. How successful you are in missions will affect which branch of the storyline you take.

COMMUNICATION PANEL

Here's where you're updated with the mission status and receive new orders. The Battle Engine Aquila is in constant contact with other fighting units.



ALL THE LATEST NEWS, VIEWS AND GOSSIP FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN



NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Hi there. Christmas is now well and truly out of the way, so as our bloated stomachs digest the last few morsels of figgy pudding and rum sauce, a whole new tantalising year of PC games is lying in wait. So what is 2003 going to be remembered for? If you read our 40-page preview special in the last issue then you'll already be slaver over a new wave of stellar PC games about to crash on our shores, including *Doom III*, *Unreal 2*, *Deus Ex 2*, *Breed*, *Halo*, *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* (page 42), *Knights Of The Old Republic*, and *Black & White 2* (page 38).

However, I reckon that 2003 will also be remembered as the year the PC stretched out far in front of the current crop of consoles, delivering truly state-of-the-art 3D graphics and immense gameplay depth – both online and offline. Innovations such as NVIDIA's GeForce FX chip, along with Microsoft's DirectX 9, means that us PC gamers fortunate enough to be able to invest in the new graphics technology will see breathtaking advancements in gaming and player immersion. Whether every developer has the time and investment to produce the next-gen titles is another matter, but you can be sure that the next few years will be very exciting indeed for the PC.

In the meantime, check out our exclusive info on Konami's *Apocalyptic* on this page, new images of *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* and *Tron 2.0* on page 14 – including spectacular Light Cycle pics – gorgeous new Hot Shots from *EverQuest II* (page 26) and a look at PC game voice-overs (page 20) with interviews from *Star Trek: Voyager's* Tim 'Tuvok' Russ and the very lovely Traci Lords. Happy New Year!

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAIL

NEW INFO ON EXTREME FX'S UNHOLY ACTION GAME APOCALYPTICA



Apocalyptic features hellish third-person melee battles.

ALONG WITH *Casino, Inc* (see page 18), *Apocalyptic* is part of Japanese publisher Konami's push to create original games on the big grey box, and this UK-developed title could be the company's biggest PC hit yet. Set after the fiery events of *Armageddon*, *Apocalyptic* begins just as Neo-Satan is amassing a terrifying army that could finally dominate the last remnants of Earth, or Nu-Hades as it is now called. You must take command of a religious order of ass-kickers to destroy the devil's minions, before taking on the Horned One himself, in a futuristic third-person action adventure spanning levels in gothic cathedrals, doomed spaceships and the depths of hell.

"*Apocalyptic* was intended to be a game that could be played in a number of completely different ways," says Tony Bickley, overseer of development at Konami Europe. "If one player wants

"You must take command of a religious order of ass-kickers to destroy the devil's minions"

to use just guns, for example, then they're well catered for, but if another player prefers melee combat then the game will also fit their tastes. However, melee combat is simply too unwieldy and confusing in a first-person setting and functions so much better from a third-person view. So while the fast, intensive combat is comparable to a first-person shooter, it's actually a title that offers a distinctive and unique gameplay experience."

A CLASS ACT

Players can choose their Good character from four different classes: The Templars, masters of melee combat with huge two-handed swords; The Robots, part human, part machine missile and sniper weapon specialists; The Seraphs, angel/human hybrids with healing and magic abilities; and The Nuns, virtuous female soldiers great at covert operations. "The Nuns' choice weapon is The Bible Basher, which is an enemy-seeking weapon that sucks energy from the Holy Bible and fires it from the barrel of a gun, spitting out blank pages in its wake," says Bickley.

Your chosen character is then backed up by computer-controlled team members, who will heal you, provide covering fire – basically everything a human player would do. However you



The Templars' restoration sword.

can also give them orders, such as guard an important civilian or bomb an enemy outpost, to ensure a mission is completed. The Neo-Satan forces you fight against in *Apocalyptic* are basically evil perversions of the good characters, so the RipperDroids, for example, are the robots of the Black Regime, and contain the tortured souls of murderers and assassins dragged straight from hell and trapped inside the lethal killing machines.

"While *Apocalyptic* is mostly an intensive action game, the way it's played is up to the player," says Bickley. "Some levels require an all-out frontal assault, whereas on other levels there are several routes which can be taken – it's up to you whether you choose to take the stealthier option or not. Also, while there are no puzzles as such, there are often enemy defenses and tactics which need to be worked out."

The four worlds of *Apocalyptic* vary from a newly-colonised human planet Jerusalem V, through to a captured human spacecraft, the violent world of Nu-Hades and on into the fires of Hell and Satan's domain. "My personal favourite is The Styxx, partly because it looks so infernally good and partly because of the way the objectives work," says Bickley. "Playing multiplayer games we've discovered that the objectives can easily be turned, creating a nice power struggle flowing back and forth across the level." We'll have a full preview of *Apocalyptic* in PC ZONE very soon.

■ Publisher: Konami
■ Developer: Extreme FX
■ ETA: March
■ Website: www.apocalyptic.net



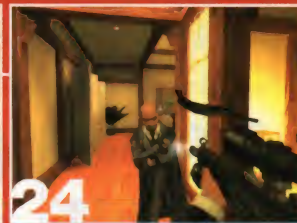
LASER SQUAD
Check out the new alien race



EMULATION ZONE
Classic gaming given new life



SPECIAL REPORT
The famous voices behind games



PCZONE CHARTS
Latest charts and release dates



Mortal PC Kombat!

US GAMES GIANT MIDWAY SET TO PUBLISH PC TITLES BEGINNING 2003

MIDWAY IS famous for its superb coin-op and console titles such as *Defender*, *Spy Hunter* and *Mortal Kombat*, however the company is now planning to bring its gaming heritage to the PC. We recently grabbed European managing director Tony Adams (no, not him) for the inside view on Midway's PC revolution.

"Midway's heritage was always in arcade and coin-ops, so it was a big move for us to publish console games worldwide – but that was all part of the learning curve," said Adams. "I'm keen to begin publishing PC games in 2003 with possibly one title we're about to sign, with a view to expanding this in 2004. It's ridiculous not to consider the PC as a games format."

Adams ruled out a conversion of the company's recent well-received platforming adventure *Haven: Call of the King*, but one of the company's other big franchises could make it to PC.

"As far as the new *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* goes, fighting games aren't really the first choice for PC gamers, but we wouldn't rule it out. In the US, Midway is in the top ten of games publishers, but in Europe we fall below that. Considering publishing games for PC is part of the challenge to improve sales over here."

But apart from PC conversions of existing console games, would Midway consider publishing a PC-exclusive title? "If there's a particularly good driving game or first-person shooter, for example, then yes we definitely would publish it as a PC-led product," says Adams. "If there are sales there, then my view is 'let's go and get them'." Watch this space – *PC ZONE* will bring you news of Midway's first major PC release very soon.

Website: www.midway.com

"It's ridiculous not to consider the PC as a games format"



Playground skipping mishaps were common.



Defender might be coming to a PC near you.

ARMY FOR HIRE

FIGHT FOR THE NOBLE CAUSE OF HARD CASH IN THE TACTICAL FPS *SÖLDNER – SECRET WARS*

NEW SCREENSHOTS have just landed on the Bulletin news desk from the online military shooter *Söldner – Secret Wars*. This ambitious team-based FPS takes place in the area of the Bering Sea during 2010, when all world powers have decided to fight wars in secret to avoid bad PR and the subsequent political consequences. How nice of them.

You play *Söldner* as a soldier-for-hire, with the choices you make for equipment and type of clothing at the beginning of the game determining the type of character you'll be. As part of a neutral elite force, you have to muck in with up to 128 other soldiers online – or offline with AI

forces – to complete various kinds of stealthy and violent missions for competing countries.

To finish your tasks, you'll have access to 50 well-researched weapons – including tactical nuclear missiles – and more than 80 vehicles and craft, including helicopters, tanks, jeeps and fighter aircraft, with more items to download in the months after release. For more information on *Söldner – Secret Wars* check out the website below.

Publisher: JoWooD
 Developer: Wings Simulations
 ETA: Q2 2003
 Website: www.secretwars.net



You'll get your mitts on more than 50 weapons – including nuclear missiles. Nice.

"You have to muck in with up to 128 other soldiers online"

SHORTS

TRAILER TRASH



Yes, this is actually a game. No, we don't understand why either. *Trailer Park Tycoon* is apparently a "comedy" sim that uses the Jerry Springer territory of low-rent USA housing for its setting. After choosing your location, you have to grow your trailer park franchise by attracting the right (or wrong) kind of clientele. *Trailer Park Tycoon* will have direct control in 3D rather than point-and-click, and will be delivered to an eager PC games market in February through Jaleco. Check out www.jaleco.com.

ULTRA FUN



Masters of the downloadable game *Small Rockets* (www.smallrockets.com) are poised to release the spiritual successor to its highly acclaimed vertical-scrolling shoot-em-up *Star Monkey*. *Ultra Assault* will feature manic action, nine weapons, configurable difficulty settings and an intuitive level-editor. And it's looking like being every bit as addictive as its predecessor. We'll bring you a review next issue, but for now, check out the demo on our coverdisk or buy the full version for US\$15 from the above website.

COMPETITION WINNERS



The *Warcraft III* Send Us A Beard compo winner was Paul Cook, Wiltshire. Runners-up: D Gordon, Rutland; Turan Holland, London; John Clarke, North Yorkshire; CrAzY_13m, Oldham; Davide Pecis, Italy. The winner of the *FIFA World Cup* compo was Gregory Brayley, Eastcote. Runners-up: Mrs E J Lewis, Herts; Chris Davies, Bolton; Paul Knight, Harlow; Katy Jarvis, Doncaster; Michael Bennett, Sully; Sue Lynch, Holmfirth; Olli Heinamaki, Reading; Lorraine Crispin, Plymouth; Steph Lyall, Solihull; Richard Bamforth, Inverness. Congratulations to you all. Don't forget to enter the *Age Of Mythology* competition on page 19 for a chance to win a Collectors' Edition.

CROFT ORIGINALS

EXCLUSIVE! SCRUMPTIOUS NEW SCREENSHOTS FROM *TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS*



THE VALENTINE'S Day Lara love-in is still on course, so we've nabbed a few pert snaps of *The Angel Of Darkness* for your perusal. This latest instalment of the Tomb Raider franchise promises a darker, more "mature" outing for Lara, who has been framed for the murder of her former mentor Werner Von Croy.

Lara is thrust into a horrific conspiracy involving a disturbing character known as Eckhardt, who is hell-bent on resurrecting an ancient race of creatures known as the Nephilim – or "The Neff" as we like to call them. For the first time Lara can now talk to people as well as shooting them in the head, plus as you progress in the adventure, puzzle-solving and exploration will be rewarded with improved skills for the buxom heroine.

Also, a new playable character is being introduced, Kurtis Trent, who in addition to Lara's new stealth and hand-to-hand combat moves, will have his own killer additions including the use of a deadly Chirugai blade for slicing and dicing adversaries. Along with alluring new costumes, cool gadgets and a stirring soundtrack recorded live by the London Symphony Orchestra, *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* could well have us falling head-over-heels for Lara once again.

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Core Design
■ ETA: February 14 ■ Website: www.tombraider.com



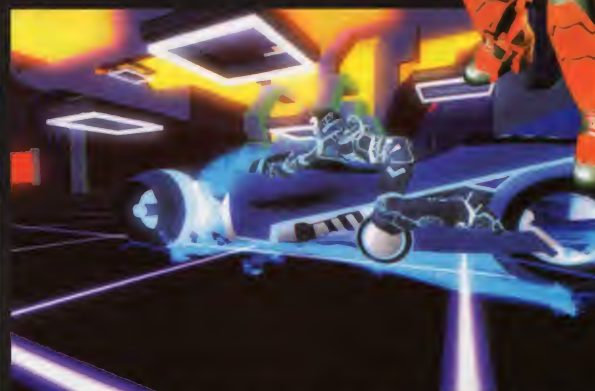
"For the first time Lara can now talk to people as well as shooting them in the head"

I WANT TO RIDE MY LIGHT CYCLE

AMAZING NEW SHOTS OF *TRON 2.0*'S LIGHT CYCLES. COME ON!



?
TRUE OR FALSE
Namco's little pill-popping Pac-Man has a brief cameo appearance in the *Tron* movie.
(answer below)



Tron 2.0's Light Cycles. It plays as good as it looks.

A new power-up allows you to pass through competitor's trails.

PC ZONE was recently given a sneak preview of Monolith's *Tron 2.0*, including the much-hyped and hitherto unseen Light Cycles – and we weren't disappointed. If you, like many of the team here, remember watching *Tron* as a kid thinking "if only we could play a game that was exactly like the Light Cycle sequence", then you're about to get very excited.

The bottom line is this: it looks, sounds and plays exactly like you want it to –

gorgeous, glowing Light Cycles, whizzing about a huge grid in a full 3D version of the old 2D coin-op. *Tron*'s original designer, Syd Mead, has even added to his original creation with a new souped-up light cycle that zips along so fast it makes the old model play like a computer-generated Sinclair C5.

However, the Light Cycles are just one of 35 levels in *Tron 2.0*, which is a full first-person adventure made by Monolith, most recently responsible for *No One Lives*

Forever 2. You play as Jet, the son of Alan Bradley (Bruce Boxleitner in the film), and after being zapped inside a belligerent computer, have to find your father and defeat the evil iCon Corporation. We'll have a more in-depth playtest of *Tron 2.0* very soon.

■ Publisher: Disney
■ Developer: Monolith
■ ETA: April
■ Website: www.tron20.net



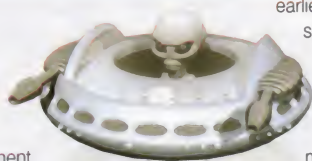
GREY POWER



EXCLUSIVE SHOTS AND INFO ON THE FOURTH RACE IN *LASER SQUAD NEMESIS*

LASER SQUAD *Nemesis*, the email-based tactical masterpiece (and more than one PC ZONER's choice for Game of the Year 2002), continues its surge for world domination with the announcement of a fourth playable race to be introduced in February or March.

Dubbed the Greys, the new race will be somewhat familiar to fans of the developers'



earlier work (such as the X-COM series). Based on your classic X-Files big-headed alien, the Greys are a physically weak but advanced race with the powers of mind control and deception.

Units will include a manned (aliened?) saucer with twin lasers, the Warp Gunner – capable of shooting through walls – and the mysterious Psi Lord.

Other additions planned for the forthcoming version 3.0 include glass windows that can be shot out, barbed-wire fences, deployable tank traps and a few other general gameplay tweaks. Keep watching the skies for PC ZONE's exclusive fourth race demo in a month or two.

Publisher: Codo Technologies
Developer: Codo Technologies
ETA: Q1 2003
Website: www.lasersquadnemesis.com

"Greys are a physically weak but advanced race with the powers of mind control and deception"



The Greys have arrived for some vigorous probing.



Laser Squad Nemesis' popularity has recently soared.



"Klaatu Barada Niktu!"

Cossacks: Back To War



Play online for a chance to win a crate of the finest **Cristall Premium Vodka** widely recognised as **Russia's finest**



The battle continues....

The award-winning historical real-time strategy has returned! For the loyal and the hard fans, *Back To War* offers over 100 new missions, new countries and new units, and even more improved AI. For the newcomers, *Cossacks – Back To War* has been developed as a product in itself, so that you get the latest and most updated *Cossacks* experience packed with the newest of gameplay features.

Fight your way across the battlefields of Europe, seek allies and vanquish the enemy. It's yet another must for any Cossacks fan old and new!

Features

- Cossacks – Back To War is both a standalone version (does not require a previous version of Cossacks), and an expansion pack
- A total of 20 different European nations to command
- 100 new single player missions
- 4 levels of difficulty
- 2 new nations: Switzerland and Hungary
- Unique architecture for each new nation, Switzerland and Hungary, with 20 new buildings
- 4 new Swiss units
- 4 new Hungarian units
- New Automated Championship System (ACS) makes the online competition a top event
- Special VIZOR enables watching online GAMES live or as a recording
- New units for Turkey & Algeria: The Bedouin (mounted on camel)
- Extra: Mod1 with 30 more new units (including coast defence cannon)



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FHM

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PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED
PHOTOGRAPHS



Muhammad Ali: The Glory Years

Felix Dennis
& Don Atyeo

*"When a man says 'I cannot', he has made
a suggestion to himself. He has weakened
his power of accomplishing that which
otherwise could have been accomplished"*

Muhammad Ali

TWENTY YEARS IN THE MAKING, this beautifully produced 280-page book offers a complete photographic celebration of the life and career of a boxing god. Muhammad Ali: The Glory Years provides a meticulously researched insight into Ali's life, starting from his childhood in Louisville and covering his meteoric rise to fame.

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**EBURY
PRESS**

EMULATION ZONE

Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator **Stuart Campbell**

MAME ART WORK GETS A DIGITAL MAKEOVER

The artwork-addition facility of MAME mentioned by Emulation Zone a few months ago has now been taken to new lengths of painstaking historical accuracy, or anoraky trainspotteriness depending on how you look at it.

In addition to reproducing the artwork on the coin-op's monitor glass, some artists have now gone so far as to replicate the entire arcade machine's cabinet, releasing graphics files which, when copied to your MAME 'Artwork' folder, place you right in front of the cabinet, inside a virtual arcade museum beside a framed copy of the game's original flyer. You have to sacrifice a hefty chunk of screen real-estate, of course, shrinking down the size of the actual gameplay area, so the files (of which there are about 150 so far) aren't recommended for anyone with a monitor smaller than 17 inches. But it's an undeniably lovely way to really bring back those 20-year-old memories.



New graphics style – can you dig it?



Mmm, love that wallpaper, space cadet.

LINKS

<http://www.thigames.com/index.html> – New MAME artwork files



Tempest 2000 – trippy fun for all the family.

MAKING A STORM OUT OF TEMPEST

It's been a long time coming, with emulators trying and failing to master the world's first '64-bit' console architecture, but one of the biggest holes in the world of emulation has finally been (partly) filled, with the recent release of the first-ever Atari Jaguar emulator.

Project Tempest's name reveals the reason most people would ever want such a thing – the Jaguar's one true killer app, Jeff Minter's astounding remake: *Tempest 2000* – and appropriately T2K is one of the high number of Jag games which are compatible with the emulator.

Sadly there's no audio emulation yet, but it can only be a matter of time before the game's fantastic, intimidating soundtrack is booming out from a PC near you. Incidentally, *Tempest 2000* was released on PC, but with a poorer-quality soundtrack and it's almost impossible to get it to run on modern hardware. However, you can always listen to a suitably 'pumping' CD while you play the emulated version on mute.

LINKS

<http://pt.emuunlim.com> – Project Tempest homepage

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

KILLER INSTINCT/KILLER INSTINCT 2 (RARE/NINTENDO, ARCADE, 1994)

With Rare recently having been sold off to the Dark Side (in the form of Microsoft), it seems like a good time to reflect on happier days when they were Nintendo's own British golden boys.

Killer Instinct the arcade game was famously claimed to be effectively running on Nintendo 64 (nee Ultra 64) hardware, these being the days before the release of the semi-ill-fated console. That particular claim was shown to be a fib by the game's eventual N64 release, but now you can see on your PC why the idea got people excited.

While effectively a straightforward 2D fighting game, *KI* boasted the beautifully-rendered '3D' graphic style pioneered in Rare's SNES classic *Donkey Kong Country*, complete with gorgeous environments and exquisite lighting effects that still hold their own even today. The game itself was a hardcore beat 'em upper's paradise, offering the chance to string together ludicrous combos totting up dozens of hits, and enabling you to actually 'juggle' your opponent in the air for

an entire bout if you could muster a true master's mad skill.

The emulator – created solely to run *KI* and *KI2* – does a splendid job, but requires the full arcade hard-drive images to run, which even zipped up clock in at a whopping 100Mb or so each, so it's recommended you use a broadband connection to download them. Unless, of course, you simply transfer them across from that *Killer Instinct* coin-op that's lying sadly neglected in the garage. We'll have no videogames piracy in this shop, please.

LINKS

<http://rcp.emuhq.com> – U64 emulator homepage



Killer Instinct is one of Rare's finest games



Why is a wolf wearing trousers, anyway?



Stopit! That tickles!

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

CRIME-RIDDED Honduras is set to solve all of its social problems by banning violent games and toys. The Central American state, where 53 per cent of the population live under the poverty line, has recently been subjected to rising levels of crime. After careful consideration, Congress decided that the best way to tackle it is to prevent people from playing computer games, including *Mortal Kombat*, *Resident Evil*, *Quake*, *Street Fighter*, *Perfect Dark*, and of course *Doom*, the ten-year-old game widely believed to be responsible for the collapse of modern society.

Honduran president Ricardo Maduro was elected a year ago on the promise of a zero-tolerance policy towards crime, and the prevention of people entertaining themselves in the safety of their own homes would appear to be at the forefront of this. The motion was passed unanimously by 128 lawmakers, and comes into effect in June 2003, giving retailers six months to clear their shelves of the offending articles. Expect drug-trafficking, gun-running, and abuse of human rights to cease immediately.

In further crime news, Vivendi Universal has had its Paris headquarters raided. Investigators have been looking into alleged accounting discrepancies at the Franco-American media giant, which owns labels including Blizzard and VU Games. The investigation heaps further misery on a firm already reeling from the poor performance of several key Christmas titles. An expert said: "Never mind dodgy accounting, someone should be arrested for that *Lord Of The Rings* game. Now that was criminal."

Meanwhile, VU Games is attempting to claw back some cash, and has resorted to the lowest common denominator, namely piggy-backing the moron-fest that is *Popstars: The Rivals*. Developed by Vivendi studio Knowledge Adventure, PC title *Superstar Rivals* is the virtual incarnation of the cretinous television show. Featuring an online voting system, the game boasts music from the likes of Enrique Iglesias, Samantha Mumba, Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Shaggy and the world unrenowned A-Teens. Plenty of copies available.

And finally, mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington has admitted that he is hopelessly addicted to an ancient PC game. In a candid interview with lefty egghead newspaper, *The Guardian*, the bearded Kendal Mint Cake eater revealed that he never travels without: "My laptop and a copy of *Civilisation* – a brilliant, clever computer game." What about a razor?

"Never mind dodgy accounting, someone should be arrested for the LOTR game"

DIRTY CASH

KONAMI BETS ON CASINO, INC FOR ITS FIRST PC-EXCLUSIVE TITLE

YOU MAY HAVE already seen the smart screenshots of *Apocalyptica* (page 12), but Japanese games company Konami begins its PC games rollout this year with *Casino, Inc.* Developed by UK developer Hothouse Creations, the tongue-in-cheek strategy title puts you in the role of a casino manager who must do everything in his power to make the business a mecca for gambling.

This includes perhaps running an attractive limo service for high-flying Italian business associates, bringing in wealthy young clientele with arcade machines or maybe attracting seasoned gamblers with roulette wheels and poker tables. However, what gives *Casino, Inc* a particularly vindictive kick is that you can use dirty tricks to nobble your computer competitors, which can include spiking drinks, starting brutal fights or even killing the owner and burying him in the desert!

With three fictitious cities, more than 120 different characters and 50 attractions to spice up your business, *Casino, Inc* could be a winner for Konami. Oh, and we're assured that the game has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that the company has very recently joined the American Gaming Association to improve its slot machine manufacturing and casino businesses...

- Publisher: Konami
- Developer: Hothouse Creations
- ETA: Q1 2003
- Website: www.hothouse.org/English



Employ more bunny girls to attract punters.



The Supremes were regular table visitors.

The Lotus Position

GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES. KUJU'S LOTUS CHALLENGE IS ON THE GRID.

RELEASED ON the PlayStation 2 a year ago, developer Kuju has been busily working on the PC version of *Lotus Challenge* over the last few months. The good news is that rather than simply rehashing the console content for our grey-boxes, Kuju is adding a whole load of new content just for us.

Racing over a series of courses in a variety of Lotus sports cars from 1950 to the present day, including F1 vehicles, us PC lovers are set to see far more competitive AI which will jostle you for position and create a far greater sense of competition. You can also look forward to racing several Lotus concept cars around the improved selection of tracks, including three totally redesigned Japanese circuits.

Lots to look forward to then, and with all the cars handling differently, and a career mode too (in which you must not only compete in races but work as a movie stunt-driver), *Lotus Challenge* is looking like giving the

competition a real run for its money come Spring.



The Lotus Esprit – we're still saving up for this one.

- Publisher: Xicat
- Developer: Kuju
- ETA: May 2003
- Website: www.kuju.com

TRACKS ONLINE

ALL NEW CONTENT FOR THE WORLD'S FAVOURITE
TRAIN SPOTTER TITLE MICROSOFT TRAIN SIM

SOME GREAT news for all you *Microsoft Train Sim* fans out there, as you'll soon be able to download all new content for the world's best virtual railway sim from www.trainsim.net.

Created by developer Kuju, the website will be selling a variety of easily downloadable add-ons, ranging from a vast choice of lovingly

recreated locomotives (ranging from around £10 to £15 each) to the latest scenery packs (a snip at a mere £5 approx).

With each file no more than 10Mb in size, even those with 56K modems will have little problem in getting hold of their dream rail-machines.

Check out the site, which we've been reliably informed, should be up and running by the time you read these finely-crafted words.

■ Publisher: Kuju
 ■ Developer: Kuju
 ■ ETA: Late 2002
 ■ Website: www.trainsim.net



Get new engines for a tenner.



"In the Mind levels you are going to face some killer cows with mighty udder guns, a mad and absolutely invincible psycho killer, werewolves, zombies and huge grenade-throwing pink rabbits..."

NuClearVision's Tim Bruns has possibly been enjoying too many prescription drugs while working on Psychotoxic: Gateway To Hell

"We're delighted to be able to develop this game and provide the Playboy audience with a new way to interact with our brand"

Alex Vaickus, president of Playboy's global licensing, on why gamers can look forward to 'interacting' with a new Hugh Hefner RTS title

"Toys? Weapons? I can't say anything about those right now either! How much fun is this? I can say that the weapons system in Oz will be unique and offer the player almost limitless variability in weapon type"

After a titanic struggle, PC ZONE manages to prise an exclusive out of the developer of Alice and now Oz, American McGee

COMPETITION *Microsoft*

Win a limited-edition box set of AGE OF MYTHOLOGY!

10 COPIES OF THE RARE AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
COLLECTORS EDITION UP FOR GRABS...

Your chance to win a bundle of *Age of Mythology* fun, including a minotaur model. Cool or what?



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY is the latest RTS from legendary developer Ensemble Studios, which effortlessly managed to score 90 per cent and become a *PC ZONE* Classic in Issue 123. Now, courtesy of Microsoft, we're giving you the chance to win one of ten limited-edition box sets of *Age of Mythology*, by Zeus!

Age of Mythology is an enthralling strategy title that lets you create your own Greek, Egyptian or Norse civilisations which have to survive against the wrath of the gods and legendary monsters such as the fearsome one-eyed Cyclops. As well as a copy of the game, the Collectors Edition features a soundtrack CD, a *Making Of* DVD, six smart mini-posters, a scintillating book of mythology and three high-quality tech trees showing each of the mythologies in detail. The pack also includes a massive movie-style poster of *Age of Mythology* and a superb minotaur figurine to play with.

To stand a chance of winning one of these highly-desirable prizes, answer the mythical question in the box right and send it on a postcard to the usual *PC ZONE* address.

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE GREEK GOD OF WINE?

A: Dionysus
B: Kebabus
C: Houmous

Send your answer on a postcard, along with with all the information requested, to the address below:

■ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and email address (and age if under 18).

■ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd.

■ Please indicate whether or not you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

Send your entry to: *Age of Mythology* Competition, *PC ZONE*, 30 Cleveland St, London W1T 4JD. (Closing date: Thursday, February 6, 2003).

Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.





The voices of many of Hollywood's A-list, including Ray Liotta, feature in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*.



Traci Lords is in *Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse*.

TALKING PC GAMES

GAME DEVELOPERS ARE HIRING RENOWNED ACTING TALENT TO ENSURE GREAT VOICEOVER WORK. NOW THE BEST TITLES ARE SPOKEN FOR, REPORTS PAVEL BARTER

THE GAMING GRAVEYARD is littered with turkeys which look great, play even better, but appear to feature the voiceover talents of a bunch of brickies on their tea-break. Some games' monotone voicework could cure insomnia (*The Prince Of Qin*) while others, despite superb gameplay, shamelessly parade bargain-basement accents (hello *Age Of Empires: The Age Of Kings*).

Thankfully there's scant room for cringe-inducing voiceovers these days. As game budgets begin to rival Hollywood, so professional presentation leaps to the fore and voice acting becomes as much a priority as graphics. An increasing amount of game svenagals are even nabbing talent from the silver screen. Take Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (coming to PC this year), which reads like a who's who of Tinseltown talent (Ray Liotta, Dennis Hopper, Burt Reynolds, Lee Majors), or *Splinter Cell* with Michael Ironside in the role of Sam Fisher.

BUT I'M AN ACTOR, DAMN IT!

However, hard cash isn't the only incentive for better known stars to lend their voices to these projects, insists Tim Russ, who plays Vulcan Tuvok in TV's *Star Trek: Voyager*. "The first game I worked on was *Star Trek: Elite Force*," he says. "I was interested in the challenge. Voiceover work is actually more difficult than screen acting as you can't use your face and body to convey the emotions and intent of the character. The emphasis of your performance has to be placed entirely on your vocal presentation."



Tuvok: "Voice-overs are harder than acting".

Gary Oldman decided to provide narration for *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault - Spearhead* when publisher EA discussed its respect for the game's subject material with him. "On top of that, we're finding actors like Gary have children or relatives that play our games... which goes a long way towards securing them," says *Spearhead* producer Brady Bell.

Starsky And Hutch's jive-talking Antonio Fargas (aka Huggy Bear), on the other hand, was keen to narrate the new *Empire* game based on the series simply because he thought the action was superfly: "When I saw it I was blown away - to be able to have one dude drivin' and another dude shootin'. Man I thought, 'Cool, I want me some of that.'"

MUMMY, THAT MACHINE SPOKE TO ME

Die-hard gamers have wanted top voiceovers since the days when Atari released its first home computer in 1979, complete with voice synthesised burps. Fast forward to 1983 and you'd find a legion of awestruck arcade fans sitting inside *Star Wars* cabinets being told, "Great shot kid! That was one in a million!" Across the hall, the hero of *Dragon's Lair* would shout frantically, while *Paperboy* nattered away next to *Gauntlet*.

PC games began perfecting voice acting in the early 1990s, and some high-calibre thespians discovered this work could be both lucrative and fulfilling. Cult *Rocky Horror* actor Tim Curry has made regular appearances in the medium since 1993's *Gabriel Knight*. Mark Hamill - that Skywalker chap - has plundered the realms of the Interactive Movie with roles in *Wing Commander III* and *IV*, and *Wing Commander: Prophecy*.

"Hiring great actors is no guarantee for a great voiceover," says Philip Morris of All In The Game, a UK videogame voiceover company. "If they're not directed properly or the script is poor, with hackneyed and clichéd dialogue, then the game won't work. On the other hand, if the storyline is well written and designed, then there is no excuse for it to be let down by poor acting or direction."

In this respect, PC adventure games have proven to be the greatest learning ground for voiceover work. *Grim Fandango*, *The Longest Journey*, *Discworld Noir* (starring Eric Idle) and *Escape From Monkey Island* all feature exceptional acting talent. These titles have, in turn, set a voiceover standard for more action-oriented blockbusters like *Deus Ex* and *Half-Life*.

3DO's upcoming action title *Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse* stars *Millennium*'s Lance Henriksen, ex-porn

PC ZONE'S HALL OF FAME

THE GLITTERING HOLLYWOOD STARS APPEARING IN A PC GAME NEAR YOU...



OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL

Thin white duke himself, David Bowie, provides narration in a game with more plot twists than an episode of *Corrie*.



THE X-FILES GAME

The truth is out there... avoid interactive movies at all cost. Still, at least Mulder, Scully and even the cigarette smoking man work with you on this.



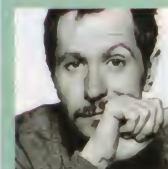
TRESPASSER

Large-jawed actress Minnie Driver and nature-hugging legend David Attenborough star in a frankly piss-poor dinosaur-ridden FPS adventure.



GTA: VICE CITY

Roll on the PC version, if only to get a whiff of Jenna Jameson under the guise of Candy Suxxx, the corrupt senator's porn star girlfriend.



MOH: AA - SPEARHEAD

Can it be true? Gary Oldman - he of *Hannibal*, *The Fifth Element*, *Leon* and *True Romance* fame - is narrating *MOH*? Sure is, soldier.

queen Traci Lords, Tim Curry, and a host of lesser known Hollywood wannabes. How did the developer go about casting these actors? The title's creative director wrote the script with Henriksen and Curry in mind, but the team nevertheless consulted LA's top nine talent agencies, providing them with scripts and character designs, to ensure they hired the right people.

"By the end of the casting process we had voiceover auditions from more than 300 actors for just nine roles," says executive producer Kelly Turner. "That's how we found Traci, who had an outstanding read." Traci Lords was delighted with landing the role in her first videogame. "I've always loved doing voices and was amazed to find that people actually make a living like this! It was very freeing, being able to add expression without a camera stuck in your face."

Glenn Wissner, *Horsemen's* producer, continues: "Once finally cast, the actors were required to read the entire script prior to recording. This helped them fully understand their characters' motivation, their relationship to the other characters in the story, and allowed them to be prepared for their roles."

PR GOLD DUST

Most developers are aware that the presence of celebs works PR wonders but they might not suit the script, so they are careful to select actors on their merits alone. Simon Pressey, lead sound engineer of *Splinter Cell*, says that Michael Ironside was hired for the game's lead role not because he gave Arnie a hard time in *Total Recall* but because he "has a strongly recognisable timbre to his voice. He is well known as a tough no-nonsense character actor. Quite simply, he had what it takes."

All In The Game's Philip Morris has worked with



Total Recall's Michael Ironside supplies the voice for Sam Fisher in *Splinter Cell*.

established actors like Joss Ackland (*K-11: The Widowmaker*) on *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, Jason Isaacs (*The Patriot*) on *Robin Hood*, and Sean Pertwee (*Worzel Gummidge's son*) on the new *Medieval: Total War* add-on, *Viking Invasion*. Voice projects cost anything between £1,000 to £45,000 which requires Philip to be selective in choosing the right actors. Sometimes that even means hiring unknown talent, and he accepts unsolicited CDs via his website:

www.allinthegame.co.uk.

Anonymity is no barrier to voiceover stardom, as singer Donna Burke proved when she landed the role of Angela Orosco in *Silent Hill 2: Director's Cut*, coming to PC in February. "I'm also in *Silent Hill 3* where I play Claudia, a 30-year-old cult leader, as well as some of the monsters. That was great fun! I've just auditioned and will resume my work with Konami in *Silent Hill 4*..."

Known or unknown, great actors are now considered a prerequisite for big budget titles. The floodgates are opening and Hollywood stars are beginning to realise how creatively fulfilling and successful PC games can be. Now turn to page 30 for *PC ZONE's* Hollywood Horrors – an in-depth look at how the film industry is turning PC games into money-spinning movies.

"I've always loved doing voices and was amazed to find that people actually make a living like this!"

TRACI LORDS
EX-PORN STAR



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Good for the Stealth

NEW MULTIPLAYER IMAGES FROM INNERLOOP STUDIOS' FPS *IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE*

ALTHOUGH THE original title was bereft of multiplayer options, this time Innerloop Studios has ensured *IGI 2: Covert Strike* will be blessed with online team deathmatching. Below are the latest shots from this stealthy FPS, complete with re-mixed graphics from the game's extra couple of months development time.

IGI 2 will have support for at least 16 players online and 32 players across a LAN, with teams competing over various objectives, such as blowing up oil refineries or hacking satellites. You'll have a cash reserve (similar to *Counter-Strike*) that you'll be able to spend on more than 30 weapons, specialist kit and resurrecting

yourself if you're killed, plus there'll also be unique access to satellite surveillance data of every gamer's position in the warzone, so you can plan detailed attacks.

Of course, single-player hasn't been neglected either, with a strong story-driven adventure spanning 19 missions over three continents, involving infiltration, extraction

and assault exercises in both indoor and outdoor locations. Codemasters will be publishing *IGI 2: Covert Strike* in February.

■ **Publisher:** Codemasters
 ■ **Developer:** Innerloop Studios
 ■ **ETA:** February 14
 ■ **Website:** www.codemasters.com



An argument over splitting the bill for a Chinese spilled into the street.



Heap big rocket.



Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON PC ZONE

GOOD COP



At last! *The Splinter Cell* review and demo. **Corking.**

Peter Molyneux giving us an exclusive play of *Black & White 2*. Our Martin reckons the game will be "groundbreaking".

Anthony's Christmas box of chocolates from Novalogic, that the **ZONE** team greedily scoffed while he was away reviewing *Splinter Cell*.

Being the first to see the latest amazing screenshots of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*.

BAD COP

Steve Hill having his wallet stolen on a recent Wanadoo trip to Paris and finding that the Gallic thief had helped himself to 650 Euros (£425.64) worth of goods on his credit card.



Telewest Broadband for the second month running. When will Sefton get his cable TV service back? We'll keep you posted...

Good Cop: **Starsky** Bad Cop: **Hutch** (both from *Starsky & Hutch* – sent in by Mark Ison from York). Send in your suggestions for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a prize!

Park Life

PLEASE NOTE – *JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS* HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ROCK DINOSAUR PHIL COLLINS...

PC ZONE was recently given the chance to get a hands-on play of Blue Tongue's forthcoming *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis* – and was pleasantly surprised. Rather than being a slap-dash cash-in, the game actually promises a nifty combination of *Theme Park*-style gaming with manic dino-baiting action.

The initial object of *Operation Genesis* is to provide a popular *Jurassic Park* for visitors, with plenty of angry, stomping dinosaurs to see, as well as decent amenities – you don't want guests having to nip behind the nearest stegosaurus for a quick slash. However, there's also 12 missions where you'll be able to go into a Ranger Cam first-person mode to

chase and re-capture escaped animals, and use a helicopter to survey your park from the air to rescue stranded tourists. Plus there's a fossil hunt that allows you to research into creating dangerous-but-crowd pleasing new strains of dinosaur, and an excellent *Pokémon Snap*-style mini-game where you get to photo the various beasts for cool bonuses.

The AI of the 25 or so dinosaurs in *Operation Genesis* seemed pretty good, and much fun was had when we accidentally caged several unfortunate visitors in a very small area with a T-Rex, with predictably horrific results. So while it may not be shaping up to be a blockbuster of *Doom III* proportions, *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis* could still be worth a visit.

■ **Publisher:** VU Games ■ **Developer:** Blue Tongue
 ■ **ETA:** March ■ **Website:** www.bluetongue.com



Bloody thing's nicked my wipers...



Fossil sites dig up new dino DNA.



Use the chopper to 'retire' dinosaurs.

SPELLBINDING

MAGIC NEW SHOTS FROM PIRANHA BYTES' RPG SEQUEL *GOthic II*

GOthic TURNED out to be a decent-enough RPG on its release a year ago, gaining 74 per cent in Issue 112 of *PC ZONE*. However, developer Piranha Bytes is preparing a sequel for release in March, which it hopes will dazzle PC role-players with a canny spell system that contains seven different "circles of power".

You begin *Gothic II* in the Isle of Myrtana as the "nameless hero" from the original adventure, with only just enough magic to cast light-healing spells, for example, or retrieve a coin from behind someone's ear.

But as you progress through the six other circles, you start to become seriously powerful, invoking huge fireballs, freezing enemies in ice blocks, creating lightning strikes and summoning armies of dark creatures of the underworld to obliterate opponents. You can choose to become a paladin, who defends people in the name of the king, a dragon slayer or a magician.

In addition to the spells, *Gothic II* allows you to transform a mage or paladin into various animals, such as a wolf or a sheep, to escape the attentions of enemies –

although you'd be wise to avoid lonely, frustrated herders on your journey. Piranha Bytes is also expanding on the impressive graphics engine that rendered huge environments in real-time, as well as numerous detailed NPCs and monsters. We'll have the full review and playable demo of *Gothic II* in a future *PC ZONE*.

- Publisher: JoWooD
- Developer: Piranha Bytes
- ETA: March 7
- Website: www.piranha-bytes.com



Gothic II has a menagerie of monsters.



Dragon! Shame you're a mage and not a dragon-slayer.

NIGHT IN THE CITY

ROCKSTAR ROLLS OUT ITS SLEEK AFTER DARK RACER *MIDNIGHT CLUB II*

THE INNER-CITY crew from *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is already scheduled for a gang war on PC later this year, but Rockstar has also just announced a new racer sequel. *Midnight Club II* is the follow-up to a PS2 driving game, and although the original wasn't too hot, Rockstar reckons the new title will provide the fast, edge-of-your-seat thrills that gamers desire.

Set in Los Angeles, Paris and Tokyo, *Midnight Club II* involves thrashing a powerful set of vehicles – including motorbikes – around open-plan courses to become the illegal racing champ. As you tear through twisting shortcuts, over massive jumps and across busy junctions, you must avoid other more sedate road users as well as panicky pedestrians and obstacles such as parking meters and mail boxes.

Visually, *Midnight Club II* on PC will be way in front of the console versions, coming ready-fitted with the latest next-gen graphics card compatibility, plus you'll be battered about the ears with a set of top techno "choons" – check out the website and you'll see what we mean. We'll have more on *Midnight Club II* very soon.



Always remember: mirror, signal, manoeuvre.

"Midnight Club II involves thrashing a powerful set of vehicles around open-plan courses to become the illegal racing champ"



Look closely and you can see the 'Daz & Karen' sticker on the windscreen.



Two-wheelers are included.

- Publisher: Rockstar
- Developer: Rockstar
- ETA: Q3 2003
- Website: www.rockstargames.com/midnightclub2



DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

I really enjoyed *Medieval: Total War*. Now I'm busy finishing *Ikaruga* on Dreamcast faster than our art director.

What was the last videogame you finished?

Medieval: Total War.

What is your favourite game of all time?

It's between *Shenmue II* (Sega), *Laser Squad* and *Fallout*.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Finishing *Mafia*.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

Sega's Yu Suzuki for the *Shenmue* project. Maybe that US\$70 million will never return, but it doesn't matter.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

That it's an open platform and gives everybody the chance to work on new stuff. It's almost like a living evolving organism.

What is your company's philosophy?

To make kick-ass AAA titles.

What's the best thing about your job?

The chance to realise my imagination.

What's the worst thing about your job?

That everything in this industry is driven just by money and people who have it, which results in bad games, clichés, frivolity in stories, not enough artistic freedom and other evil things.

What are you working on at the moment?

Can't say.

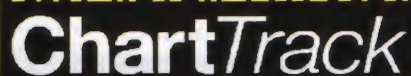
What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Illusion Softworks' next game...

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it





The UK must be a nation of pet lovers to keep *The Sims: Unleashed* at number one for a third month running. Electronic Arts' army of little people are also hogging the number four and nine spots for the second month in a row. Ker-ching!

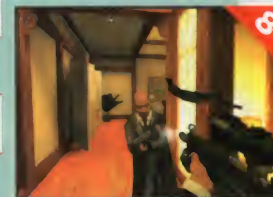


EA's first official expansion pack for WWII FPS *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* parachutes in at number two. *Spearhead* features a ton of new scenarios and weapons, plus a new multiplayer mode called *Tug of War* for Domination/Assault style of play.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA	78%
2 NEW	MEDAL OF HONOR: AA – SPEARHEAD	EA	82%
3	HARRY POTTER: COS	EA	74%
4	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA	N/A
5 ▼	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT	90%
6 ▼	FIFA 2003	EA	80%
7 ▼	THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TFOTR	BLACK LABEL	54%
8 NEW	JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE	EA	87%
9	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	EA	66%
10 ▼	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES	80%



Cashing in on the huge success of the *Two Towers* movie is Black Label's *Lord Of The Rings* in seventh place – although this game is based on the original Tolkien book. Be warned – *TFOTR* is a yawnsome RPG and a waste of a stellar licence.



James Bond is enjoying a successful entry at number eight (ahem), bringing his brand of sex and violence to the FPS genre. Despite being slightly predictable with no great abundance of Q-style gadgetry, *Nightfire* is still an enjoyable romp for 007 fans.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

"What a good time EA is having at the moment. And it's not all down to everyone's favourite *The Sims* (throws up). We all know EA has some good games under its belt... but to have seven of the top ten is unreal."

Disturbing_Aim

"A solid, but not amazing chart line up. I think the whole industry is winding down right now, waiting for the next big thing to kick it back into shape. Hopefully *Unreal 2* will do that."

Dandy_Flugle

"All big named and hyped games in this month – *The Sims*, *Harry Potter*, *007*, *LOTR*. Come on Breed!"

ToXin3



TOP 10

1	JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE	EA
2	MEDAL OF HONOR: AA – SPEARHEAD	EA
3	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
4	HARRY POTTER: COS	EA
5	THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TFOTR	BLACK LABEL
6	FIFA 2003	EA
7	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
8	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES
9	COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3	MICROSOFT
10	MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION

COMPETITION



Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, **PC ZONE** and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: What is the name of the James Bond film that featured the evil villain Scaramanga?

Answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo (CPCZ02A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: February 6 2003

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to **PC ZONE**.

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

JANUARY

GI COMBAT	MINDSCAPE
GLOBAL POWER	GMX MEDIA
HIGHLAND WARRIORS	NOVALOGIC
IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES	MICROSOFT
LIONHEART	INTERPLAY
MASTERS OF ORION III	INFOGRAMES
SIM CITY 4	EA
SPLINTER CELL	UBI SOFT

FEBRUARY

AMERICAN CONQUEST	CDV
CASINO, INC	KONAMI
ANNO 1503	EA
BREATH OF FIRE IV	CAPCOM
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS
COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS	EA
DARK AGE OF CAMELOT	WANADOO
DINO CRISIS 2	CAPCOM
GROM	CDV
IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE	CODEMASTERS
IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES	UBI SOFT
INQUISITION	WANADOO
PHANTOM CRASH	PHANTAGRAM
PORT ROYALE	BIG BEN
PRAETORIANS	EIDOS
RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD	UBI SOFT
SHADOW OF MEMORIES	KONAMI
SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT	KONAMI
TOCA RACE DRIVER	CODEMASTERS
TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
UNREAL 2: THE AWAKENING	INFOGRAMES
VIETCONG	TAKE 2
WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES	EMPIRE

MARCH

APOCALYPTICA	KONAMI
AQUANOX 2: REVELATION	JOWOOD
BLITZKRIEG	CDV
CHASER	JOWOOD
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3	CODEMASTERS
CRUSADERS - BATTLE FOR OUTREMER	WANADOO
DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN	NOVALOGIC
ECHELON: WIND WARRIORS	OXYGEN
DEVASTATION	HD INTERACTIVE
GOTHIC II	JOWOOD
INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB	ACTIVISION
IRU	MICROIDS
JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS	VIVENDI
METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE	KONAMI
O.R.B	MINDSCAPE
POST MORTEM	MICROIDS
RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC	UBI SOFT
RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT
SAVAGE	IGAMES
STALKER: OBLIVION LOST	CDV
THE GREAT ESCAPE	SCI
TRON 2.0	DISNEY
WILL ROCK	UBI SOFT
XIII	UBI SOFT

TBA

DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER	TAKE 2
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
MAX PAYNE 2	TAKE 2
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

UNREAL 2: THE AWAKENING

OK, SO Unreal 2 has only been put back a couple of weeks, but to us gamers, that can seem like a lifetime when you want to get hold of a first-person shooter as fantastic as this. PC ZONE will have the world exclusive review next issue.

- Publisher: Infogrames
- Developer: Legend Entertainment
- ETA: February 7
- Website: www.unreal2.com



DRIVER 3



BAD NEWS for fans of this driving series, as the PC version release date has been put back until May 2004! However, if Reflections can deliver cinematic shoot-outs combined with the series' superb driving model, it should be worth the wait.

- Publisher: Infogrames
- Developer: Reflections
- ETA: May 2004
- Website: www.infogrames.com

WWII: FRONTLINE COMMAND

THE BITMAP Brothers' WWII strategy title was due out this autumn, but has since disappeared from view, with publisher Codemasters removing any reference to the game on its website. Trouble at t'mill? We'll keep you posted.

- Publisher: TBC
- Developer: Bitmap Brothers
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.bitmap-brothers.co.uk



US TOP 10

1	HARRY POTTER: COS	EA
2	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
3	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
4	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES
5	BACKYARD HOCKEY	INFOGRAMES
6	MEDAL OF HONOR: AA - SPEARHEAD	EA
7	ZOO TYCOON	MICROSOFT
8	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
9	ZOO TYCOON: MARINE MANIA	MICROSOFT
10	THE SIMS: VACATION	EA



EVERQUEST II

EXCLUSIVE! FRIGHTENING SCREENSHOTS FROM THE DARK SEQUEL TO THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR MMORPG



TIMES HAVE CHANGED in Norrath. The land that houses fantasy epic *EverQuest II* isn't what it used to be. A visit to Sony Online's San Diego offices reveals sinister forces are at work... most notably the development team.

Adventuring in the new time period, which is known as the Age Of Destiny is the stuff of legend, but it's fraught with peril. Zones like the Fallen Gate, former home to a thriving Dark Elf community, is now a dungeon complex crawling with restless undead. Foreboding temple Cazic-Thule looks especially evil in its newly bedecked malevolence, and features giant eyeballs that track your every movement.

And we reckon the new areas might even be scary enough to frighten the pants off bosses like the mighty dragon, Darathar the Deceiver. Castle Nektropos, for one, looks particularly twisted; scarred by wicked wizardry, its winding corridors feature the most disturbing geometry this side of a HP Lovecraft yarn. The Bixie beehive isn't so inviting either, with mysterious, glowing honeycombs host to a half-human menagerie.

Pretty though the newly created 3D engine is, it's been put to horrific use. For every lovely vista you'll spot, there's an equally creepy temple or tomb in store. *EverQuest II* is dreadful news for perpetually cheerful faeries, but deliciously tempting for the rest of us evil necromancers...

- **Publisher:** Sony Online Entertainment
- **Developer:** Verant Interactive
- **ETA:** Autumn 2003
- **Website:** www.everquest2.com





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THE LITTLE SHOP OF HOLLYWOOD HORRORS

PRESENTED IN
ZONE-O-VISION

Last time Hollywood tried to marry games with films, nature cried out in pain. Now they're set to unleash another wave of terror upon us. Have they learned from their mistakes or will it be another B-movie nightmare? Adam Phillips investigates...

"THIS MOVIE is a piece of f***ing s**t! No one's going to like this f***ing movie," screams the director as he storms into the auditorium after the private screening of his latest creation. Phone calls are hastily made and editors flown in to get to work that afternoon on the up-and-coming potential blockbuster before the test screening in the evening.

Come 7pm and it's showtime – this time to 800 people. The re-cut version plays out, the final credits roll, and once again an angry voice can be heard yelling that the movie is a "f***ing piece of s**t".

To one person up in the projection booth, this is high comedy. So funny in

fact that he posts the entire experience online. The movie? *Tomb Raider*. The director? Simon West, the Hollywood hotshot who gave us *Con Air*, *The General's Daughter* and Rick Astley's *Never Gonna Give You Up* pop video.

While the bean-spilling witness claims his story is genuine, the above could be no more than scurrilous rumour mongering. The kind that also claims that Simon West didn't even bother to play the *Tomb Raider* games before he directed the movie (despite interviews with West where he says he did) – rumours that claim he employed someone to play them for him and then watched the whole thing back on video.

More revealingly though, such rumours and allegations demonstrate just how contentious the issue of bringing a videogame to the silver screen really is. That the videogame cognoscenti (that's us) are ready to trash anyone who doesn't deliver what we believe to be the definitive small-to-silver screen adaptation of our beloved games. We're a tough audience. Much like the comic fans before us. And the book lovers before them.

In *Tomb Raider's* case, we all know that the knives were drawn well before the film's release. And with good reason too – we'd been bitterly disappointed with each and every game adaptation in

the past, so *Tomb Raider* simply had to be bad, right? While pundits declared that Angelina Jolie was Lara Croft, the film itself was regarded by most as a story-less and soulless cash-in – another cynical attempt to take advantage of a pre-existing audience and create a lucrative movie franchise.

Despite its critics though, *Tomb Raider: The Movie* was a box-office success, and more importantly a vital litmus test for the videogame and movie industries' future relationship. To know why, you have to go back, as bad as the memories might be, to *Super Mario Brothers: The Movie...*



DARK TIMES

At the beginning of the '90s, with consoles such as the NES in the States doing sterling business, videogaming was beginning to make an impact on popular culture – a fact backed up by a survey in 1990 that revealed Mario, Nintendo's flagship character, was more recognised by America's youth than Mickey Mouse. Inevitably, such statements snared the attention of Hollywood, always on the lookout for a new audience to target. Dollar signs flashed in the eyes of Hollywood producers and game publishers alike. People coined horrific terms such as Siliwood and Holly-wired. And the first wave of videogame adaptations swept in.

In 1993, *Super Mario Bros* was released. Starring Bob Hoskins as the iconic plumber, the film cost US\$80 million to produce. It could have been the start of something big but only managed to scrape in US\$32 million in returns. Not to mention that it was one of the worst pieces of crap ever committed to celluloid (see boxout: How. Could. You?).

More diabolical adaptations followed – in 1994, possibly videogame adaptations' darkest hour, *Street Fighter: The Movie* and the truly awful *Double Dragon* were released. They were both declared DOA by film critics when they hit cinemas – an opinion reflected by dire box office figures.

1995 saw the arrival of what many claim was the only half-decent adaptation of the first wave of game-films. *Mortal Kombat*, directed by confirmed gameshead Paul WS Anderson, did at least manage to capture the spirit of the videogame. It cost only US\$20 million to make and grossed a respectable US\$70 million, but even this potentially decent franchise was trashed by its piss-poor

DEUS EX MACHINIMA

TO HELL WITH VIDEOGAME ADAPTATIONS. WHY BOTHER WHEN YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN BLOCKBUSTERS... WITH YOUR PC? NO, REALLY...



Machinima film *Devil's Covenant* had more than 15 sets.

Enter Machinima, a form of storytelling born out of the bowels of *Quake*. While players regularly loved to record themselves in the throes of a good, hard frag, it took a clan known as the Rangers in August of 1996 to create what is believed to be the very first example of Machinima with *Diary Of A Camper*.

Instead of simply recording their gun fights, the Rangers turned the *Quake* world into a virtual movie lot, with player characters as the actors and dialogue represented by text messages. The *Quake* world embraced the technique – more movies were to follow.

It took Clan Phantasm a year to create *Devil's Covenant* which featured 15 plus sets, a wide range of non-human characters and tailor-designed special effects. Its creators (now working on *Eschaton: Nightfall*) believe that it would have cost them US\$1 million to film on celluloid what they managed to produce for US\$300 using the Machinima process.

Fast-forward to the present day and Machinima has become ever more refined. The Ill Clan (www.illiclan.com) has been garnering itself a reputation with its comedy shorts such as *Hardly Workin'* and *Apartment Huntin'*. The clan's

producer, Frank Dellario, defines Machinima as: "Any film created in a real-time virtual 3D environment. Machinima is just a technique."

But a technique that requires serious production work – from pre-written storylines and storyboarding through to rendering and recording the live action, it's a hybrid of live TV, theatre and cinema. All using the humble game engines of your favourite first-person shooters.

Go to www.machinima.com for more information...



Who're you calling big nose?

sequel, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* in 1997. It bombed spectacularly.

At this point, Hollywood's infatuation with videogames seemingly came to an end, its fingers badly burnt. What had seemed to be the beginning of something beautiful had turned into a one-night stand with awkward glances the following morning. It was all but over.

Still, some optimistic parties insisted on revisiting the concept from time to time, but all met the same fate. The dull adaptation of *Wing Commander* came and crashed out. The Japanese found a more common-sense avenue with animated renderings of games, but only the *Pokémon* feature released in 1999

was a true hit, grossing more than US\$80 million.

For a time it seemed that games and films had found their proper roles. Games would be made of films, certainly, and films would be heavily influenced by games – but not actually attempt to recreate them. But we should have known Hollywood could never resist such money charms...

ACT TWO

In case you haven't noticed, we now find ourselves besieged by a second wave of videogame adaptations. Hollywood is banging more lustfully than ever on the door of the industry, desperate to achieve some sort of synergistic coupling.

2001 saw the arrival of *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*. *Final Fantasy* flopped famously, while *Tomb Raider* flattened the box office, dragging in nearly US\$300 million worldwide. The genre antics of *Resident Evil* added further credibility to the form, and now it seems like another licence is snapped up every week, however bizarre and unlikely: *Max Payne*, *Deus Ex*, *Medal Of Honor*, *The Sims*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Grand Theft Auto* (see Future Shock? boxout). And despite the relationship's track record, the numbers are impossible to resist. The videogame industry has continued to grow exponentially over the last few years – last year its takings apparently surpassed those of the film industry

altogether – citing a cool US\$9.4 billion compared to the movie industry's US\$8.35 billion (though such figures are notoriously hard to verify).

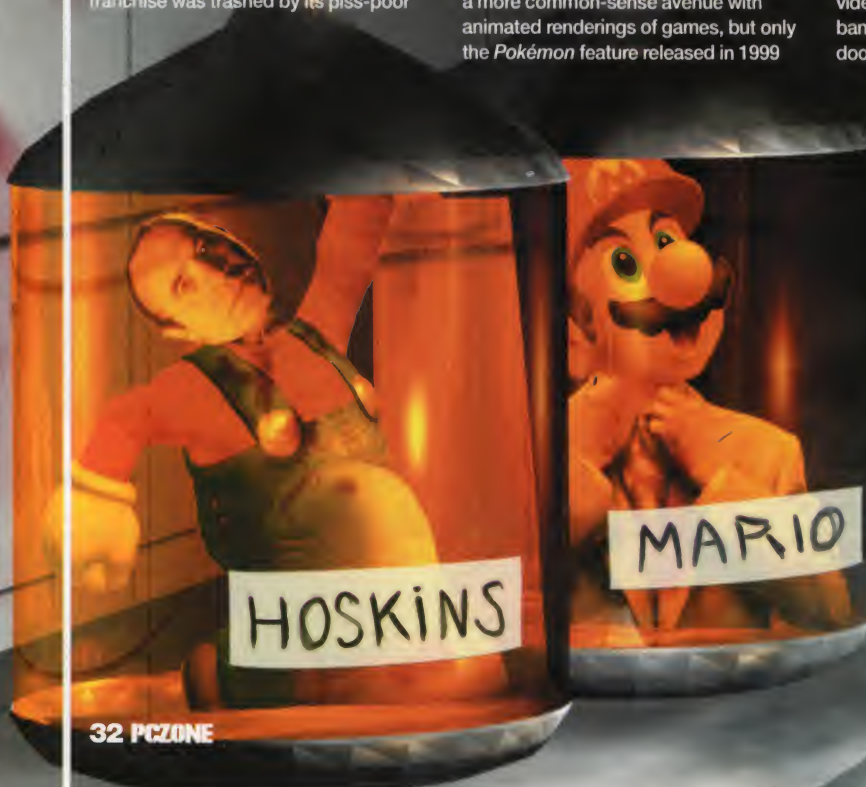
So are videogames finally ready to conquer the silver screen globally?

"Because of Lara, the nervousness that said games are not mass-market enough has gone out of the movie business," says Core Design's MD Jeremy Heath-Smith, executive producer on the *Tomb Raider* film. "The movie industry has gotten off the fence and said let's have a look at what's in there."

Lara's victory was clearly vital, and developers are well aware of their new-found kudos: "When I was over in LA a week ago, I took meetings with practically every big agency in Hollywood," says Jason Kingsley, top dog at Rebellion and now a budding film producer. "All of them said that videogames are hot, hot, hot because they are seen as reaching a 16 to 34-year-old target audience that, say, books and their ilk don't reach."

Uh-oh. Yes, *PC ZONE* can hear those alarm bells ringing. We're all just a demographic – a cashcow waiting to be milked. But hasn't anything else changed since that ill-fated first wave of game adaptations?

"Gone are the days when you could just take the character's name, dress it up in its costume, throw it up there and call it an adaptation," reckons (*PC ZONE*-verified) games fan Dean Georgaris, screenwriter of the forthcoming *Lara Croft And The Cradle Of Life: Tomb Raider 2* and John Woo's next film, *Paycheck*. "Hollywood has a



HOW. COULD. YOU?

PC ZONE PEERS OUT OF THE DARKNESS AND UP AT THE SILVER SCREEN. CUE PROJECTOR - HERE ARE SOME OF THE LOW (AND HIGH) POINTS OF VIDEOGAME ADAPTATIONS...



Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft. The videogame adaptation that triggered a Hollywood 'feeding frenzy'...



SUPER MARIO BROTHERS

Hollywood put its big toe into the murky waters of the videogame world. And promptly had its foot ripped off. *Super Mario Bros* starred Bob Hoskins as the titular hero on a quest to save the princess (and Earth) from evolved dinosaurs led by Koopa (played by Dennis 'The Ham' Hopper). The end result? A truly abysmal and frequently strange action movie bearing only occasional and offensive resemblance to the game that... er, 'inspired' it. Risible and astonishingly wide of the mark.



DOUBLE DRAGON

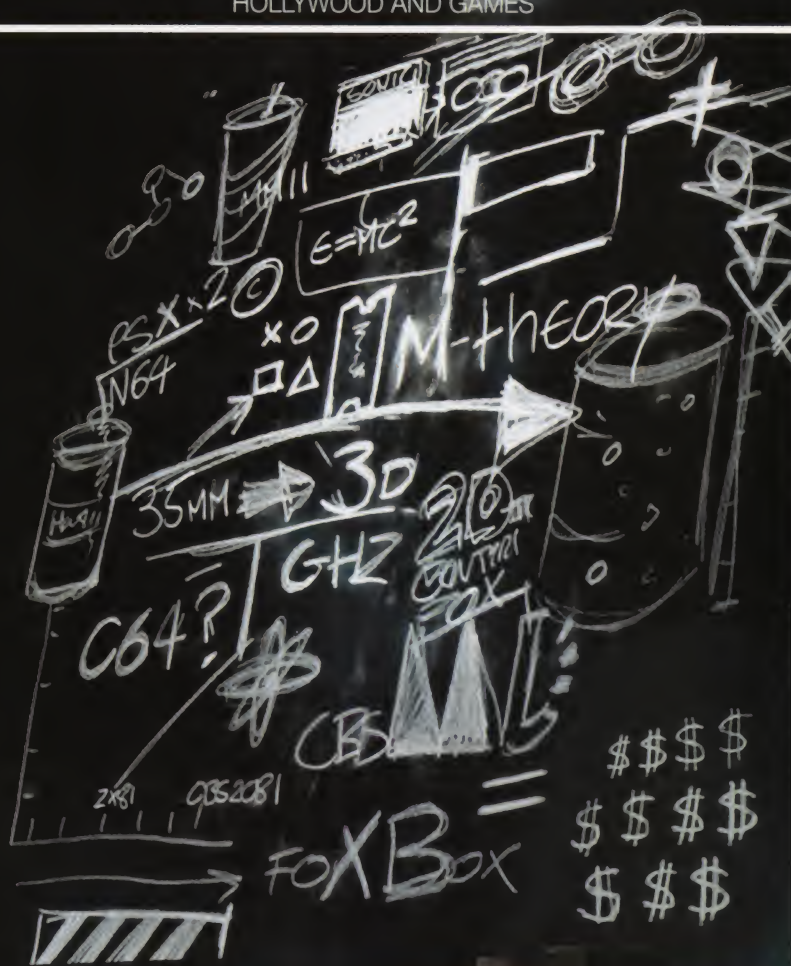
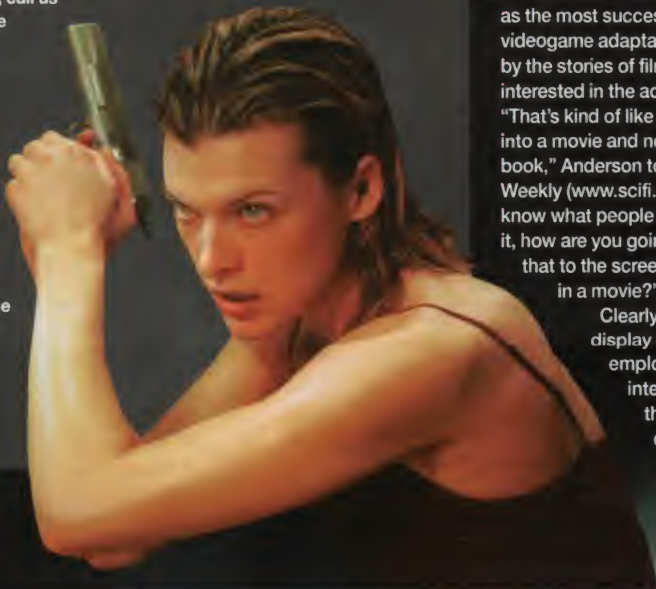
It must have seemed like a 'sure thing'. The classic beat 'em up had been massive hit but the movie turned out to be a deformed foetus of a film. If anyone in Hollywood wants to know how not to make a videogame adaptation, pop down to your local video shop and rent it. If it still exists...

TOMB RAIDER

Yes, Angelina Jolie is that good and Simon West directs the action sequences with real flair. But the botched story concerning an ancient talisman and the exploration of Lara's relationship with her father falls flat. Very flat. It's no *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* for the 21st century. But, call us crazy, we still have moderate hopes for the sequel.

RESIDENT EVIL

Director Paul WS Anderson said he'd never make another videogame adaptation after *Mortal Kombat*. But seven years later he brought us *Resident Evil*, a dumb-but-fun slice of B-movie hokum with rampant viruses, zombie dogs and corporations running amok which successfully captured the cheesy spirit of the game series. A sequel is already in development.



great deal of respect for the games themselves - for the people who design them and the storylines. Therefore, for a videogame adaptation, you will get a bigger budget, better directors, better writers and bigger stars. It's being taken very seriously."

HIP WITH THE KIDS

According to some pundits, there's also a generational issue here: "I think that we now have a generation of filmmakers who understand videogames and have played them," says Rebellion's Jason Kingsley. "Ultimately it's because we now have people in positions of power who actually play games as part of their leisure lifestyles such as Paul 'Resident Evil' Anderson."

Indeed, the director who many cite as the most successful creator of videogame adaptations to date is aghast by the stories of filmmakers who aren't interested in the actual game itself. "That's kind of like adapting a great book into a movie and never having read the book," Anderson told Science Fiction Weekly (www.scifi.com). "Unless you know what people really love about it, how are you going to try to bring that to the screen and reflect that in a movie?"

Clearly it was a baffling display of arrogance to employ people with no interest in games in the first place, but it doesn't necessarily follow that

filmmakers who understand games will understand how to render them effectively in cinematic form. Some believe that Hollywood will never be able to capture the spirit and imagination of a game in celluloid form. Others claim the problem is with the games themselves...

In an interview with film industry bible *Variety* earlier this year, screenwriter Danny Bilson claimed: "Good games do not make great movies." It's an especially telling comment because Bilson was brought in by Electronic Arts to script and develop for film the likes of *The Sims*, *Medal Of Honor* and *Agent Under Fire*. "There's a feeding frenzy [in Hollywood] that doesn't make sense," says Bilson. "The game-space isn't famous for its great fiction. People who play games

"Unless you know what people really love about a game, how are you going to try to bring that to the screen?"

PAUL ANDERSON
FILM DIRECTOR, *RESIDENT EVIL*

FUTURE SHOCK?

HERE'S SOME OF THE VIDEOGAMES YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE HITTING SILVER SCREENS NEAR YOU SOON...

MAX PAYNE

The Gossip: The film rights for this slick shooter were sold to Dimension Films and Collision Entertainment before the game was even released. One of the screenwriters drafted in for the adaptation is Shawn Ryan who created the gritty cop show *The Shield* and penned episodes for the acclaimed *Buffy* spin-off, *Angel*.

PCZ Expectation Factor: The game's storyline reads like a clichéd Hollywood movie – tough cop's family is murdered. Cops goes psycho. But with a writer like Ryan, perhaps *Max Payne* the movie could end up with the edge and humour needed to enlarge on its mundane 'cop-hellbent-on-revenge' origins.

STATE OF EMERGENCY/
GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

The Gossip: SOE was a great game idea – player finds himself in the middle of a riot-ridden city of the future – but the end result was utterly underwhelming when released on PS2. Enter New line Cinema though who claim the game "is an action franchise waiting to happen." Its production team has also been spotted sniffing around GTA3. "What we're doing differently here

Alien vs Predator – the mother of all adaptations.



No Payne, no financial gain – Hollywood reckons Max could be the next Dirty Harry...

is buying the rights for a videogame based on its story, not its sales," explains producer Warren 'American Pie' Zide. Uh-huh. **PCZ Expectation Factor:** The basic premise for *State Of Emergency* (and *GTA 3*) were engaging enough – we'll have to wait and see just how well such über violent games are adapted to the big screen for a young audience.

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

The Gossip: It's the franchise to end all franchises. The film of the game of the comic of the other films. The director of *Mortal Kombat* and *Resident Evil*, Paul WS Anderson, is set to write and direct an adaptation based on the games, not the comics. Producers include Lawrence 'Tomb Raider' Gordon, Walter 'Alien 1-4' Hill and Joel 'The Matrix' Silver. In other words, this being taken very seriously by some of the biggest players in Hollywood.

PCZ Expectation Factor: If Anderson can pull it off, we'll be very happy indeed. Fingers crossed. Knives sharpened.

Other titles rumoured to be in 'pre-production', development hell or that have had their film rights snapped up include *Doom*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Fatal Frame*, *Dead Or Alive*, *Duke Nukem*, *Alice*, *Agent Under Fire*, *Silent Hill*, *Oni*, *Perfect Dark* and, bizarrely, *Descent*.

really know which ones are worthy of being a film or not, and there aren't too many of them. I haven't found one."

It's damning criticism, but surely an over-reaction. Just because a few studio types buggered it up the first time round doesn't mean the whole concept of a game-film is unsound. Indeed, *PC ZONE* can see no reason why brilliant films couldn't be made from some of our favourite games.

Mark Altman, chief operating officer of Mindfire Entertainment (currently bringing *House Of The Dead*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Dead Or Alive* to the silver screen), agrees: "I think that videogames have grown a lot more sophisticated," says Altman. "How could you have made a movie out of *Pac-Man* or *Missile Command*? I think that games now have much more detailed storylines and well-developed characters. Writing the script for *HotD*, we had a lot of elements that we could use in the script before we even first stared at that blank page." (Funnily enough just after this was written a *Pac-Man* movie was announced – Ed.)

While it can be argued videogame stories can be left wanting in terms of originality, perhaps the cynics are missing the point. id Software's *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* has been optioned by Warner Brothers on a 'fast track' for production. And it could work – after all, *RTCW*'s story basically reads like a juicy Hollywood premise and in capable hands, there's no reason why it can't succeed as a horror-action genre flick.

ACTIVE PLAYERS

What's truly revealing though about id's deals with the likes of Warner Brothers and Columbia Pictures (for *Doom*) is that developers are becoming less 'starstruck' and playing a more active role in terms of how their games are portrayed on the big screen. The likes of id have the ability to veto any script that comes their way but Oxford-based Rebellion has gone even further by creating their own production company, Fearnort.

"It's the production arm for low-budget films based on comics, computer games and original titles – it trains us to know what skills we need to have to make bigger movies!" says Jason Kingsley, whose company owns the *2000AD* and *Judge Dredd* comics. He currently has two *Dredd* movies in development and while they will be based on the comics, Rebellion's approach to the adaptations could set a precedent for future game-film crossovers.



"Videogames have grown a lot more sophisticated. How could you have made a movie about Pac-Man or Missile Command?"

MARK ALTMAN
COO, MINDFIRE ENTERTAINMENT

"They are being produced by Shoreline in Hollywood with whom we have a joint venture to develop the movies back to back," says Jason. "Before we did the deal with them, I said that Dredd will not take his helmet off, wouldn't kiss a girl in the movie and that the lawgiver is incapable of delivering double whammys. actually said: 'Guys, before we go any further, these things will be written into the contract and if you don't like it, I'm going right now.'"

It's this kind of empowerment which perhaps is the key to the future of creatively successful adaptations.

While the likes of Rebellion recognise that Hollywood boasts an untouchable film-making skillset, furnishing yourself with a thorough understanding of the moviemaking process and taking much more control over the production can only be good news for those who want to see true-to-the-source adaptations.

Ultimately, while we, the punters, may be cynical that Hollywood is still merely 'using' the videogame industry, there are those out there who have high hopes for the future: "I think Hollywood and the videogame industry will get closer and closer," says Dean Georgaris. "Graphic novels and narrative videogames are going to be the principle sources of creative material in the future because they are the principle avenues of expression for the next generation of storytellers."

So is there a bright future for game-movie tie-ins, with true gaming fans making intelligent films that both fans and the mass-market will embrace? There's no reason why not. And as long as there's a buck in it, it will happen eventually. **PC**



The silver screen can hurt – the underachieving *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* hit its makers Squaresoft hard...



The Sims: The Movie. It could happen. Hate-mail to: will_wright@maxis.com



Two Judge Dredd movies are on the way – not starring Sly Stallone, thankfully.

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES™

UNLEASH A DIFFERENT KIND OF ANIMAL

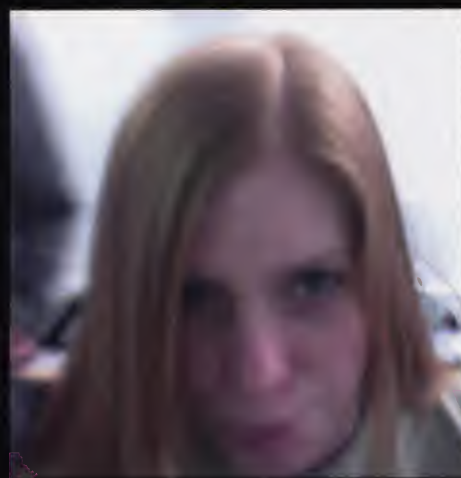
ADAPT



C DRIVE WARLORD

Glasgow, Scotland

You think you've got balance - don't be FOOLED! I'm sending in PIRANACHEETAH's: Taking advantage of the fastest of land animals with a ferocious set of teeth to match. They enjoy a frenzied bout of pack hunting and are agile enough for a surprise attack in a 30 min. death match - it's sink, swim, run or be devoured!!



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game studios™

relic
entertainment

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OR DIE



Wizard

London, England

Send in my TURTLE-PHANTS, they might sound like a subjugated military troop but with the massive stomping power of an elephant and the protective armour of a turtle – on land or sea these guys'll flatten anything in their path and still take no flak – you won't be coming up for air!

...C-ya; most definitely don't wanna be ya!



SLAYER

Cardiff, Wales

If you guys think you've got all the combinations covered – think again.

Meet: TIGRA! Start running boys, because this cat's renowned for fast paced vicious and violent attacks. She's deadly in herds and her unique camouflage means she's one of the most aesthetically pleasing animals in this arena – but DON'T BE DECEIVED you're going to be seeing more than stripes when she catches up with you. Au revior. 😊



Introducing the next evolution in real-time strategy games.

Get ready for a world where fast paced evolution is the first law of survival. Welcome to Impossible Creatures, the next real-time strategy game from the makers of Homeworld®. Use the Creature Combiner to create an army of outrageous mutant animals and then unleash them on your enemies to engage in onscreen combat like you've never seen. Featuring over 40,000 possible animal creations, fast-paced RTS action, dynamic immersive 3D environments and intense online multiplayer action – your opponents are as limitless as the creatures you create.

www.impossiblecreatures.co.uk

Not every game in the world is... **BLACK & WHITE 2**

Martin Korda strolled round to Black and White Studios to see the next evolutionary jump in RTS gaming

CV

BLACK AND WHITE STUDIOS

Set up specifically by Peter Molyneux to create Black and White games, and now headed up by rising star of the industry Jonty Barnes, Black and White Studios is already one of the UK's most successful development teams.

2000 Black and White Studios set up as a satellite company of Lionhead Studios, created specifically to work on Black and White games.

2001 *Black & White* is released to universal acclaim, breaking sales records and amassing some of the most impressive review scores in gaming history, including 95 per cent from us.

2002 *Black & White: Creature Isles* improves on B&W's already superb formula by adding a host of new trials, miracles and spells, while lowering the amount of micromanagement and improving the AI.

2003 *Black & White 2* for the PC and *Black & White: Titans* for the PS2 are aiming for a release this year, although exact dates are yet unknown.



You'll be able to concentrate on either city building or conquering.

SEQUELS. Don't you just hate them? You spend three years working yourself up into a wet-panted stupor about the prospect of your favourite game building on its success, exploring new avenues and throwing up new cerebral challenges to your game-addled brain, and what do you get? Hmmmm? Well? I'll tell you what. The same bloody game, that's what. Same

engine (only with 1.5 polygons more per character), same concept, same niggling glitches, mistakes and lazy shortcuts, grafted together with the skill and fore-thought of a U-grade GCSE computer-studies project. If you're lucky. Unless that is, your sequel is being made by one of the greatest names in PC gaming history, Peter Molyneux. His exploits are legendary, including rumours that he is capable of programming two hit games – one with either hand – at the same time. And given his near-impeccable track record, it wouldn't surprise me in the slightest.

And so it was that on a cold, lethargic morning, depressed further by an energy sapping drizzle which misted the horizon like a dirty blanket, I travelled to Black and White Studios to spend a day with Peter, studio head Jonty Barnes and the rest of his team, dissecting and

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Black and White Studios

PUBLISHER EA

WEBSITE www2.bwggame.com

ETA TBA

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Massively improved creatures
- Simplified interface
- Earth-shattering graphics
- Stunningly versatile new spell system
- Gargantuan battles involving thousands of troops
- Fully tactical 3D terrain

CREATURE COMFORTS

WANT TO BREED YOUR OWN PERSONAL KILLING MACHINE? YOU'RE IN LUCK.

Bloody stupid monkey. Minkey? No monkey. You said minkey? No I bloody didn't, I said monkey. Stop being stupid. Anyway, as I was saying, bloody stupid monkey. If I had a penny for every time I screamed those words at my monitor while

playing *Black & White*, I'd have enough to buy two packets of crisps. And I don't mean Space Raiders either, I'm talking about the posh M&S stuff.

If you spent any serious amount of time trying to nurture your creature in *B&W*, you'll know how frustrating it could be. A fact Peter is well aware of. "I made a lot of mistakes with the creature in *B&W*, most of which were based around it being too hard to tell what you were teaching it," admits Peter humbly. "You had a creature which you rewarded and punished, but it was pretty hard to tell what you were rewarding and punishing it for. So now, you get to pick the thing which you punish and reward it for. This will mean that you can make an incredible creature."

But this won't be the only change. No-sir-eeeeee. You'll also be able to train your giant animal to lead your armies, tear down enemy walls, push open gates and even hold yours closed as an enemy creature tries to force them open. All of which is well worth going ape about. Sorry.

sampling the sublime delights of their latest masterpiece-to-be, *Black & White 2*. If you're not excited about this game by the time you reach the end of this preview, then you're dead from the neck up.

STUDIO TIME

The day began with an informal boardroom-based chat, a welcome haven from the bitter chill which had made a mockery of our winter clothes with merciless ferocity. Without any prompting, Peter began by explaining what he believes are the major changes needed to improve on *B&W*. "Doing a sequel is great as you can throw away all the ideas which you think you'd done a poor job on the first time round, and really expand on all the things which were compulsive and exciting about it. We've spoken to hundreds of people from fansites about what they loved and hated about *B&W*, what they'd like to see more of and what they felt we could do a better job on. What it came down to was throwing away some things and enhancing other things massively. We've actually ended up having to re-write practically all of the game. In fact about 99 per cent of the game, just so we could put in these enhanced features. Which is why we're confident *B&W2* will be far better than *B&W*."

Being able to accept the faults of a creative process that you've become so

"Doing a sequel is great as you can throw away all the ideas which you think you'd done a poor job on the first time round"

PETER MOLYNEUX
DIRECTOR
BLACK AND WHITE STUDIOS

City walls are a new feature.



SPELLCRAFT

THE MAGIC CIRCLE HAS NOTHING ON THIS LOT



ones, which you can play around and experiment with, and Epic spells, which are totally over the top," he explained.

However, even the standard spells are set to be breathtakingly imaginative. Take the Fireball spell, which in *B&W* would impact like a cotton wool ball. In the sequel, there'll

be all new water mechanics, which will also be applicable to fire. As Peter explained, "In *B&W2*, you'll be able to squeeze a fireball in your hand, and the fire will start dribbling out of the bottom. So if you squeeze a fireball at the top of a hill, then these little rivers of fire will start running down and burning a course through the hill. You can even squeeze fire into trenches. When you throw it, it'll land like napalm and spread out."

If you thought the Normal spells sound impressive, then you'd better start thinking again, according to Peter. Because the Epic spells are set to be unlike anything ever seen in a computer game before, such will be their immensity. "Things like Earthquake, Volcano and Hurricane will be totally visual feasts." Even though I didn't get to see them, the new engine is looking so groundbreaking that I don't doubt him for a minute. And neither should you.

closely associated with is a sign of true character and artistic maturity, something Peter clearly has silos of. It's also the kind of mind-set which is making *B&W2* look like one of the most exciting sequels in gaming history.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

As our discussion progressed, it became clear that Peter believes that you never really felt enough like a god in *B&W*. In his concern to rectify this failing, he's created a whole new set of spells (see the Spellcraft panel). However, Peter also feels that despite the huge, often intimidatingly large levels in *B&W*, the game as a whole failed to deliver the epic scope of his original idea. A problem which is being addressed in a number of innovative ways.

First off, story. "*B&W2* sees a world at war. Every tribe is fighting. Because of your influence in *B&W*, they actually learned from you how to fight and develop weapons. Now there are all these wars going on, and you may think, 'That's just awful, why can't there be peace, love and harmony in the world?'" explained Peter as a wry smile crossed his lips. "So you may just want to spread peace everywhere. On the other hand you may think, 'Yes, this is the world I want. I want to go out and lead the biggest and most destructive army the world has ever seen. I want to destroy rape, pillage and conquer every part of the world.'"

"The final choice is to find a balance somewhere between the two. So the focus of the game is whether you are going to be a god that likes to nurture and protect, or the sort of player whose only aim is to get as many people into your army as possible."

LIKE ALIVE

All of which is making *B&W2* look far more immersive and

"I want to go out and lead the biggest and most destructive army the world has ever seen"

PETER MOLYNEUX DIRECTOR



Shaving for the first time can be a real nightmare.

coherent than anything seen in the first game. But what of the problem of identifying which path – good or evil – you're travelling down. There were certainly some hints in *B&W*, but it was, especially in the early stages, slightly confusing as to which path you were following. Fear not, Peter's on the case.

"Every living thing, from the sky to the sea, will change to reflect the type of god that you are. So if you're evil, you'll start to notice that the trees won't have

blossoms on them. Instead they'll be all scary and spikey. Even your villagers will walk and socialise differently. Everywhere your creature walks they'll either leave flowers or vines depending on whether they're good or evil." And as if to prove it to me, Peter beckoned me towards the room's double doors. They swung smoothly open, revealing a room teeming with people, faces masks of concentration as they worked on the virtual jigsaw pieces they'd been assigned to compile for Peter's grand vision. And as Peter loaded up a creature, a giant ape, hair soft and flowing, I saw for myself the beauty of the new engine, the fluidity of the animation, augmented by effects so real, it was hard not to feel as though



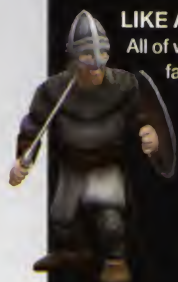
Soldiers, up close and personal.

they were nature itself. As the ape lumbered from side to side, flowers sprang up where its feet had been mere seconds before. In a word, it was breathtaking.

The monkey ambled for a while, passing rolling hillsides and majestic forests, until it reached a city wall, shoulder high to the titan primate. There was, of course, a reason why Peter had taken us here. "One of the big new things we have are walls for the good side, which protect your people while they construct city buildings and make your city beautiful. If they are attacked by other, evil gods, you then have to try and hold off the siege. So instead of going out looking for battles, you protect your people. That's not to say that if you choose to play the game this way, you can't take an army out and go and fight the people that have just fought you. The rule is, though, that the more you use your army for the sake of conquering, the more evil you become." Army? Conquer? Tell me more, I shrieked in a tone usually reserved for a castrated monk singing descant. So Peter did.

MORE, MORE, MORE

As it turns out, one of the most incredible renovations is the addition of armies. Armies so huge that even the likes of *Medieval: Total War*'s hordes will be made to look like mere casual gatherings. I watched as Peter gathered together a group of warriors consisting of archers and melee soldiers, by electing one peasant as a disciple leader who then went round recruiting killers for his cause. Soon the numbers swelled





"B&W2 sees a world at war. Every tribe is fighting"

PETER MOLYNEUX DIRECTOR

to tremendous proportions, at which point Peter broke the silence. "What we've done is worked on the interface to make controlling your armies really simple. Once there is a big group, they'll start carrying a flag. You can put this flag on an enemy's buildings, and they'll go and attack it. You'll be able to get your troops to follow your hand wherever you move it too. It works much like a magical lead. If you pick up one flag and put it on top of another one, they'll join together to create a bigger army. If you carry on doing this, you can create huge armies of hundreds of thousands of villagers armed with bows and melee weapons."

I've seen it, and believe me, it really is as simple and



Battles look incredible when you zoom into the action.



Pro fox-hunters go feral.



intuitive – not to mention groundbreaking – as it sounds.

TACTICAL MUSINGS

Now that we'd established that there'll be gargantuan battles to look forward to, I was keen to find out about what tactical options there'd be. Such as strategic 3D terrain and tactical manoeuvres. Luckily, Peter was keen to fill me in. "All the terrain stuff will be there, like pincer manoeuvres and height advantage. What I want the player to do is to attack and lay siege to other settlements. Most hardcore gamers will want to go and attack and destroy the other cities. Most non-gamers will want to spend their time building and nurturing their cities."

"When I play something like *Age Of Empires*, I build up my city first, then my units, then I up my tech levels, before attacking. With *B&W2*, I can have my main citadel, with these huge walls protecting my villagers, and feel safe to go off with my army and attack an

enemy city. I want the battles to be truly epic." Before I could press him further, Peter picked up a legion of archers and placed them on his city's wall. With one sly coded shortcut, he ordered them to fire. A torrent of wood and metal arched through the sky like a hailstorm of daggers, before sinking into the ground with a satisfying thud. Every single arrow, thanks to the new physics engine, had buried itself into each surface, which included houses and trees, to different depths. I needed to sit down, and in silence we trudged back to the comfort and safety of the boardroom where I listened as Peter explained how his aim is to a simplify the game world, reducing it to set of themed islands (Greek, Japanese and so on) to which you can retreat should an enemy drive you out of your stronghold. And how AI gods may or may not feature towards the later stages of the game (although I'm guessing by his broad smile that they will).

Awe struck, I thanked Peter and Jonty for their hospitality profusely, spouting superlatives at inanimate objects as I was inserted into a cab. Forget about the mistakes of *B&W*. This sequel could well go down in history as the game which heralds a new dawn in PC gaming. I kid you not. [E]



Spot the ape. Answers on a postcard.



LATEST ON...



The Internet Age also saw the rise of the well-groomed terrorist.



Never trust a man with a beard. And a fully-automatic assault rifle.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ritual Entertainment/
Gearbox Software

PUBLISHER VU Games

WEBSITE www.cs-conditionzero.com

OUT March 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's single-player *Counter-Strike*
- 10 new weapons
- Fully backwardly compatible with *Counter-Strike* online
- Movie-like event sequences in every mission
- Realistic team and enemy AI

Three... two... one...

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

It's been a while, but now it's firmly back on our radar screens. It's single-player *Counter-Strike* and it's nearly finished. *Martin Korda* is the man with the information the world's been waiting for

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
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Don't get too close to other men in the changing room.



The visuals have come on in leaps since we last visited the game.

SIX MONTHS, two weeks, four days, two hours, 12 minutes and 18...19... 20 seconds ago I stood transfixed in a small sweaty room in the LA Convention Center, staring slack-jawed and petrified as a brutal fire-fight exploded around me. Next to me stood an equally paralysed Dave Woods, sandwiched like a piece of ham between two men so large that if they lost balance would take out an entire city block. The situation looked bleak. Terrorists had taken several civilians hostage, and the rescue team was pinned down in one room, outgunned, outnumbered and seemingly outdone. Bullets rained down on their position, pinning them down like deadly needles – a sheet of metal, cutting

through windows and sending thousands of shards plummeting to the floor with an ominous ring. And then... the climax. A rocket arched through the air, seemingly sucking the sound out of the world as it hurtled towards its impact point. Anti-terrorist bodies flew like skittles propelled by a perfectly placed bowling ball. And then there was silence.

"So what do you think?" The words dragged me back to the real world with an embarrassing jolt. Blinking violently, my eyes came into focus on the beaming faces of Doug Lombardi (director of marketing for Valve Software) and Randy Pitchford (president of Gearbox), their question hanging unanswered in the ever more crowded room, which happened to

"Anti-terrorist bodies flew like skittles propelled by perfectly placed bowling balls"

be playing host to one of the most exciting games of E3, *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. So what did I think? Well, apart from being sent into a speechless stupor, a quick glance at my reflection betrayed a grin wider than a *Celebrity Fat Club* contestant.

That was in May 2002. Back then, *Condition Zero* was looking little short of finished, its stunning scripted sequences, lifelike AI and beautiful graphics making it stand out as one of the highlights of the show. Today, six months, two weeks, four days, two hours, 15 minutes and 22... 23... 24 seconds later, and we're still waiting for the release of the single-player version of the world's most popular online shooter, which is set to take you on a





"I'm not jumping. I don't care what you say."

worldwide journey of exhilarating missions in a battle against terror. Or even as the terrorists themselves. So what's taken so long, when will it be done, and what has changed I hear you ask? Well, you're in luck, because, right here and right now, you're about to have all your questions answered.

GO, GO, GO!

As *Condition Zero* heads towards completion, I caught up with project manager Erik Johnson. Itching to find out when we'll see the finished product,

I asked why there had been such a delay, seeing as the original release date was slated for August 2002. His reply took me more than a little by surprise. "While we've mentioned target launch dates, at no time was CZ being driven by one. Instead the goal is, and has always been, to define and deliver the best single-player experience within the *Counter-Strike* universe. That has proven to take longer than we originally hoped, and we've made a variety of changes along the way. We still believe in the viability of single-player *Counter-Strike*, and we're very excited

IT'S A WAR OUT THERE

CAN COUNTER-STRIKE STAY ON TOP IN THE FACE OF SUCH STRONG OPPOSITION?

It's the question we've all been asking for months. Will *Condition Zero* maintain *Counter-Strike*'s superiority in light of the release of so many other excellent online shooters? We certainly think so (see this month's Supertest on page 88 if you don't believe me), but what does one of the key members of the game's development team think? "*Counter Strike* still reigns supreme above all other real-world multiplayer games," says Richard Gray (one of the chief level designers at Ritual Entertainment). "It has been the best for years, and I don't see that changing anytime soon."

But of course *Condition Zero* will still be a major player online, as it'll be backwardly compatible with *Counter-Strike* and will let underpopulated servers be filled up by bots. So Rich, in no more than 50 words, why do you think *Counter-Strike* has been so successful online? Go... "Simplicity. It's everything a real-world shooter should be and nothing more. You feel as though you're in a real battle and you fear the sound of each and every gun shot. The ease of controls is another factor. I love CS because it has everything. Elegant efficiency, that's what we called it in engineering!" OK, that's 55 words, but I'll let you off just this once.



CS online - shoot at strangers for fun, without spending a night in a cell.

I WANT TO WEAR YOUR SKIN

BRACE YOUR EYES FOR GRAPHICAL UPDATES.

Condition Zero is a million miles from *Counter-Strike* when it comes to graphics. This is no bad thing, as the *Half-Life* engine is looking pretty dated.

In CZ, the engine has been extensively tweaked with models now boasting nearly double the polygon counts (rising from 700 to 1300). What's more, the weapons now have all new skins with higher resolutions and enhanced detail. However, for those of you with lower-end machines, there'll also be lower polygon version, so there'll be no need to worry about a loss of performance when you're getting battered online by some snot-faced smug git of a 12-year-old with too much processing power and time on their hands.



about the direction it's taken since we've partnered with Ritual." Who? What? Partnered with Ritual? That's a new one on us. It's a secret that's been kept quieter than a gagged mute. With no tongue. But it's true, and it's a partnership that Erik has every faith in. The only problem was, I now had to track down Richard 'Levelord' Gray, one of the chief level designers at Ritual Entertainment to find out what's new in the world of *Condition Zero*. After several days of looking (behind the sink, under the bed, in the sugar bowl) I finally find him. In the USA. Hah, there's a thing. Well I was warm with the sugar bowl.

First off, I ask what are the main changes since that dramatic demonstration at E3, where we saw the scripted 'Event' sequences that had been added to heighten the tension of each mission. "The primary purpose of *Condition Zero* is to deliver a C-S single-player experience," he says. "That single-player experience is played out over a

change or tweak." Good news for modders then - a new easy-to-use utility for creating set-pieces and scripted events. The ultimate online mod could yet become the breeding ground for a new generation of single-player mods...

And there's more: "Minor events will provide stimulating immersion into the scenario, and they may be as simple as special animations or dialogue. These character-based scripted events will make the AI seem more alive and interactive with the surroundings. Instead of a terrorist simply folding out from behind cover, *Condition Zero* will have special roll-out and dive animations. Characters can be seen rolling down stairs when shot, flying out of windows while shooting, carrying an injured buddy away from the battle, and more."

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

It's clear just from this that Ritual hasn't been sitting back cupping its collective

"Instead of a terrorist simply folding out from behind cover, CZ will have special roll-out and dive animations"

wide variety of scenarios, each containing at least one major memorable moment, as well as multiple minor ones. All of these sequences won't simply be eye candy, but rather each will be interwoven into the player's success for missions and objectives."

EVENT HORIZON

Sounds great. So I push him for more. "The major events are Hollywood-style action scenes such as an entire building blowing up and collapsing, or working with a team of counter terrorists on a deep reconnaissance mission," he says. To achieve these, Ritual has added a new device to *Condition Zero* called the Trigger Sequence.

"This new entity is a robust and powerful scripting language for coordinating timed events, scripted sequences, localised dialogue, and more," explains Richard. "The best part for level designing and MOD-making, is that the trigger sequence entity is an external text file, allowing for greater flexibility and easier integration. The map doesn't need to be re-compiled with each

balls, relying on *Counter-Strike*'s already formidable popularity. Scripted events and Hollywood-style sequences are all well and good, but the true worth of any shooter is in its AI, weapons and mission design. At E3, these were already looking breathtaking, but Ritual has been working over-time to improve these yet further.

So how will each mission work then? After all, with all your teammates being AI controlled, standing and watching a mission once you're dead (like you would online) would be more tedious than being a spectator at a snail marathon. "Each mission will have a main objective and minor sub-missions, some of these will be time-based," says Richard. "There will not be a timer, per se, but if certain objectives and sub-missions aren't completed before, for example, a bomb explodes, the scenario will fail. The mission will be considered a failure if you die, and you'll need to restart. Auto-save zones will be supplied based on testing."

Save zones? In *Counter-Strike*? Could be interesting. So how about some new mission objectives other than the standard rescue the hostages and defuse

the bomb fare? "The single-player objectives will mimic the existing multiplayer game play styles, while adding a wide variety of single-player-oriented objectives inspired by movies and real life. Meanwhile, there will be no new multiplayer game types included with CZ – at least not at launch." Care to elaborate on what will be included? "Not until nearer to release." Shame.

TOOLING UP

Right, on to the hardware then. As we know only too well, several new weapons such as the riot shield, Molotov Cocktails, LAW Rockets and FAMAS and Gail sub-machine guns have already been announced, as well as enhanced versions of every weapon we're familiar with from *Counter-Strike*. However, I still whelp like an over excited pre-adolescent girl as Richard divulges information about several more.

"There are at least 10 new weapons and items designed to enhance the tactical experience of the game, but I can't mention them all... of course." Errr, of course. "I will mention a couple,



No shooting on the rooftop please.

though. The player will have a blowtorch to burn a clear path through some obstacles. The player will also have a radio-controlled bomb, simply because they are so much fun. We've added a bunch of new, standard weapons that we'll be discussing closer to launch." Sounds, great, can't wait. And could this mean that we'll be seeing levels with destroyable doors that you can burn holes through? Now that would be fun.

With time running short (Ritual is working all hours of the day to get CZ finished, hopefully for a March 2003 release), Richard is keen to wrap things up. But I couldn't let him go without first discussing possibly the most important aspect of *Condition Zero*, the AI.

Imagine the horror of loading up one of the most anticipated games of 2003, with grandiose plans of training yourself into a killer, sitting in front of your monitor dressed in full camo-gear, face smeared with your girlfriend's/mother's/escort's mascara as you dive into the AI fray, only to find the enemy shows the intelligence

of a dropped-at-birth baby gibbon which has mistaken a banana for a MP5. The horror. But, thankfully, it seems we have little to worry about.

"We are creating AI that acts intelligently, and captures the team-based experience you'd expect from *Counter-Strike*. This is being achieved with our enhanced scripted sequence technology, specialised AI systems, as well as sophisticated animations and character interactions with its environment," explains Richard. Which, I'm sure, comes as a relief to us all.

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

And that's all we had time for. In a couple of months we should be able to see for ourselves just how much more Ritual has improved on the already incredible looking game that we saw six months, two weeks, four days, three hours, 42 minutes and 3... 4... 5 seconds ago. From the sound of things, it's going to be immense. Let the countdown begin. [CZ]

CV

ritual
entertainment

RITUAL ENTERTAINMENT

Yes, Ritual has taken over the reins of *Condition Zero*. Here's a run down on its rather colourful history

1996 A promising start with the *Quake* expansion pack *Scourge Of Armagon*

1998 Ritual releases the highly acclaimed *S.I.N.*, which along with a handful of other titles (*Half-Life* anybody?) herald a new age in FPS gaming.

2000 *Heavy Metal: F.A.K.K. 2* and *Blair Witch Volume 3: The Elly Kedward Tale* not only have ridiculous names, but sadly fail to take a largely disinterested world by storm.

2003 With both *Star Trek: Elite Force II* and *Condition Zero* due in early 2003, Ritual looks set to shoot back to prominence in the action gaming scene. Watch this space. OK you can look away now.



Spot the third man and win... nothing. Sorry.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT THE TERRORIST AND THE CT?

Sadly there won't be an on-going story, as such, in *Condition Zero*. However, what there will be is self-contained story in each scenario, or as Richard prefers to describe it, "Each scenario has all the intensity and tension of an entire adrenaline-pumped action movie compressed into a single set of levels." The idea will be that every scenario will start off with a briefing either from a commanding officer in the field or from HQ over the radio. And although the objectives will be clearly defined, apparently they'll be anything but easy to complete.



Bring it on.



Moving huge armies in this monster of a game can mean your left flank not knowing where your right one's going.



Incas, what have they ever done for us?



The third legion visits the local Tesco.



Build those ships, me hearty!

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER GSC Game World

PUBLISHER CDV

WEBSITE

www.americanconquest.com

ETA Spring 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Massive armies of up to 16,000 soldiers
- 12 different nations each with their own varying units and tactics
- Spans 300 years of American history ranging from 1492 to the American civil war
- From the same people who brought you the excellent *Cossacks*

Bigger, better, rougher, tougher...



AMERICAN CONQUEST

Keith Pullin always wanted to go to South America. But invading it with a horde of vicious Conquistadors wasn't quite what he had in mind...



"A hardcore monster that's ten times as intense as *Cossacks*"

FRANCISCO Pizarro's rout of the Incas at the start of the 16th century is one of the most despicable events in the annals of human history. The treacherous Spaniard tricked the naïve Peruvians out of all the land and wealth they owned and then had them executed. Even by normal conquistador standards his greed and ambition were extreme. But it was this kind of cruelty that set the standards in America and over the next few hundred years things only got worse. Welcome to *American Conquest*.

ARMY MEN

With more than 300 years of New World conflict, 42 missions across eight different historical campaigns and 12 separate nations including Spain, England, Aztecs, Incas, Mayas, Sioux, Iroquois and the

American Union, *American Conquest* is a hardcore monster of a strategy game. If you've experienced the delights of *Cossacks*, then prepare yourself for an all-encompassing gaming experience that's ten times as intense.

After spending a weekend tearing up the Americas with a new preview version, it's clear that when this historically accurate RTS hits the shops in early 2003, it's likely to be about the toughest thing you've ever played.

One of *American Conquest*'s main claims to fame is that you can control up to 16,000 troops at the same time, and, believe us, from what we've seen you're going to need every one of them.

From the outset, the enemy AI is finely tuned. Native tribes specialise in guerrilla tactics and constantly hit your base from

all sides with small groups, and then quickly disappear back into the jungle. So, when playing as the Spanish, for example, you have to always think ahead – like a game of chess.

Winning a battle is not just a case of throwing hundreds of troops at your Mayan attackers. Any bulldog tactics usually result in your neatly arranged formations of riflemen and swordsmen being lured into narrow Andes valleys and slaughtered in a manner that, in fairness, they probably deserve.

To beat the wily native defenders you have to play them at their own game. Elevation is crucial. If you can line an escarpment with ranged weaponry and shoot down into the mob, satisfaction is guaranteed. Likewise, if you can occupy one of the many caves and cubby holes



dotted around the numerous massive maps, the surprise element as your soldiers pop out like demented, psychotic rabbits will reap major dividends.

In the final version of *American Conquest*, it should be interesting to see how these specialist tactics affect the feel of the whole game. In theory, what we should actually be presented with is not just a 300-year parade of evolving weaponry, but a rolling demonstration of how tactical warfare itself evolved. And as we've stressed before, the size of the game means that you can stage your historical clashes on the scale at which they actually would have occurred.

FRIGGING IN THE RIGGING

The focus on historical accuracy is not just limited to AI and tactics either. The developers have tried to keep the visuals as realistic as possible. Playing *American Conquest* is a surprisingly pleasant aesthetic experience. Individual soldiers clean and reload their weapon after each shot is fired. Even forts have puffs of gunpowder wafting out of them as soldiers try desperately to gun down the relentless enemy advance.

Ships are also an impressive sight. Resplendent with full rigging and casting a shimmering reflection on the rolling waves, the navy is a truly awesome sight. On top of this, maps evoke a huge amount of atmosphere and realism, with

See my shiny boats, see how they sail and fire hot lead at the natives.



Temples - mmm, crumbly.

rivers that flow at varying speeds and even magnificent waterfalls.

The old-school isometric style might be a sticking point for some, and admittedly it does look a bit haggard alongside the likes of *Praetorians* (which you can check out on our cover discs). But when it comes down to it, *American Conquest*, like *Cossacks*, blends functionality with ageing good looks (a bit like *Sean Connery*), and any criticisms will probably arise from simple prejudice rather than constructive reasoning. Certainly as far as we can

tell, this should be about the best looking isometric RTS around.

LEFT LEG IN, RIGHT LEG OUT

By far the most awkward aspect of playing *American Conquest* will be managing your vast armies. In the version we've been hacking away at, there appeared to be a fair amount of indecision in the ranks. When you select a large group of soldiers and send them to a certain location, half of them go one way and the other half choose another. This is purely because the armies are so massive

Q&A

SERGIY GRYGOROVYCH

GSC Game World is hot property right now. In fact, the company is so hot, their CEO is practically radioactive...

PCZ Is it true that the GSC Game World office is close to Chernobyl? Have you suffered any adverse effects?

SG You English are so easily scared. We're fine. You should come and visit us. Have you ever been to a post holocaust town?

PCZ Strangely, no.

SG I have been to Chernobyl twice, it's not that bad. I was standing 50m away from the sarcophagus at the reactor. The radioactivity was high, about 20 times higher than normal, but we had masks and special suits, so it was safe enough.

PCZ Sounds like a great tourist attraction...

SG It's ironic because the countryside surrounding Chernobyl is now the only place in the world where wild horses live. In fact, there are many wild animals in 'the zone' because humans don't go there. The terrifying conclusion is that humans are more dangerous to animals than a nuclear explosion.

PCZ Well, it's good a nuclear explosion has its upside. They're always so maligned don't you think?

SG There are amazing sights there. There's a canal around the reactor that contains catfish that are so big you actually feed them whole loaves of bread instead of crumbs.

PCZ Thank you Sergiy, it's been an education.

and spread out over such huge areas, a soldier on the east flank is in a completely different part of the map to a soldier on the west flank.

Ultimately, to work with such mammoth numbers, it will boil down to good management. Dividing your armies up into manageable chunks should quell some of the problems. But still, it means that to succeed in *American Conquest* you will need to be one hell of a strategist.

And if our strategy goes to plan, we'll have a definitive verdict of this gargantuan game within the next few months. **PCZ**

One day son, all this won't be yours.



"American Conquest is a surprisingly pleasant aesthetic experience"

CV

GSC GAME WORLD

Founded in 1995 in Kiev, GSC Game World is the premier Ukrainian developer. Development is divided between two full-time teams, one making shooters the other RTSs.

2001 *Cossacks: European Wars* is the game that kicks GSC into the big time. Top-notch shooter *Codename Outbreak* follows later in the year.

2002 Two expansion packs for *Cossacks* are released through the course of the year: *The Art of War* and *Back to War*. More large scale historical unit-bashing.

2003 *American Conquest*, *STALKER: Oblivion Lost*, *Cossacks 2*, *Hover Ace* and *FireStarter* are all due for release in what could be a huge year for GSC.

LATEST ON...

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN



Singles wanted for group action. **Anthony Holden** signs up

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Novalogic
PUBLISHER Novalogic
WEBSITE www.novalogic.com/games/DFBHD
OUT February 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The *Delta Force* is back, with more semi-tactical mayhem
- Looks better than ever
- Loads of vehicles
- Well-paced, varied gameplay



DELTA FORCE games live and die on their multiplayer. Or so goes the conventional wisdom. The latest runner from the *Delta Force* stable, *Black Hawk Down*, is aiming to pervert the course of history, not only by providing a nicely playable revision of America's disastrous 1993 incursion into Somalia, but by having a single-player game that's just as compelling as the online side. We've already had a taste of the multiplayer with the online demo, but the true test came this month, when some brand new single-player missions landed on our desks.

And we must say we haven't been disappointed. The four levels in the new beta code were clearly chosen to show off the diversity of action Novalogic has crammed into the game this time round, and they do so with considerable aplomb. Rather than splitting different types of action up into different levels, each mission is a carefully scripted blend of styles, broken up into several short, pacy, objective-led bursts. It's a strictly linear approach and at times completely on-rails, but it does make for an exciting pseudo squad-based romp.

To give you an example, even the shortest mission on offer involves at least

four distinct segments. You start the mission on a river barge, just as it's delivering you to a small village where UN supplies are being handed out. As you step on to the jetty, bandits launch an attack. Needless to say, this is your cue to unhook the trusty M-16 and cap a few Somali bad-boys, taking pains not to wipe out too many starving villagers in the process.

About a minute later the reinforcements arrive: two trucks packed with bandit gunmen. While you can blow these people carriers sky-high simply by emptying a few clips into the cabin, the preferred action is to hop in a nearby hummer and use the mounted 50-calibre to turn them all into Swiss cheese. Not only far more satisfying, this also ensures you don't run out of ammo later in the mission (no ammo pick-ups here).

After this, another bandit attack starts on the other side of the village, at which point it becomes obvious that they're using a nearby bridge as a rallying point. A

quick recce to the bridge ensues, followed by another shoot-out, a tangle with some snipers, a few more trucks to blow up (with your underslung grenade launcher), then a swift retreat before blowing up the bridge with some satchel charges. And... breathe.

TURKEY SHOOT

Variety and pace are the keywords here, though closet generals may be upset to hear that tactical depth and realism most certainly are not. There are one or two more stealthy missions, but *Black Hawk Down* is definitely more *Operation Wolf* than *Ghost Recon*.

Strangely, the arcade pace sits quite well with the Somali setting, conveying a

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general sense of chaos and panic not unlike that of the film (did we mention it's not based on the film?).

Indeed, probably our only beefs at this stage are minor things like visibly re-spawning enemies and a scarily high spec requirement. There are some nice graphics lurking in there but we suspect you'll need a pretty hefty machine to draw them out.

It's not going to be the most tactical shooter out there, nor the best looking, but *Black Hawk Down* is going to be bloody entertaining. *PC ZONE*, at least, already finds it hard to put down. Check out this issue's cover discs, where we've got you an exclusive single-player demo. [M]

"The arcade pace sits quite well with the Somali setting, conveying a general sense of chaos and panic"



"You wanna be in my squad?"



Insert *Ride Of The Valkyries* soundtrack here.

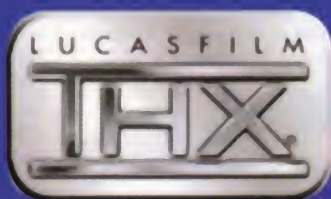


The look of a man with death in his eyes and sand in his undercrackers.

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Secret Service: In Harm's Way
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Neverwinter Nights™
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Grand Theft Auto® III
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Soldier of Fortune® II: Double Helix
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Hitman 2 Silent Assassin™
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
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Up close and personal with a heavy armour unit – good thing he's on our side.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sony Online

Entertainment

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft

WEBSITE planetside.station.sony.com

OUT Q2 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- An FPS that supports several thousand players!
- Three factions, ten continents, and a world that operates 24/7
- Team-based play that allows for role-switching on the fly
- Guns, vehicles, and intercontinental warfare – a soldier's dream

Massive Attack PLANETSIDE

First-person shooters go global in Sony Online's massively multiplayer epic. **Scott Steinberg** plays it and realises the truth – this means war!

DUCK AND COVER – a classic tactic in troubled times. But it doesn't do much good when there's a horde of enemy soldiers, two MagRiders and a shell-spewing Lightning tank barreling down on your ass and all you've got handy is a measly AMP pistol. Bugger it all... in

the next life, you'll be packing a heavy assault readout. Welcome to life on the front lines, soldier. Welcome to *PlanetSide*.

For those with a short memory, Sony Online Entertainment is the most powerful force in the massively multiplayer universe. We're talking *EverQuest*, *EverQuest 2*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Sovereign*, and this, the world's first true massively multiplayer FPS. With such heavy-hitting stablemates, *PlanetSide* is sometimes a bit overlooked in the race for online domination, but *PC ZONE* is ready to set things to right. We've just paid an exclusive visit to the Sony Online command centre, and we've played the damn thing – and believe us this is going to change the face of online fragging forever. Here's what it's all about...



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Halt – I come in pe... arrrrgggggh! Did you have to do that?



Freshly implanted, your soldier is ready to rumble.

TRIPLE THREAT

Why can't we all just get along? It's a question that's plagued mankind for centuries, and apparently will do well into the future, as the three races populating *PlanetSide*'s embattled world in the far-off Star Cradle have nothing but hatred for one another.

Choose to play as the Terran Republic, and you'll find an empire with a fondness for old-fashioned, mechanical gear. Opt instead for the Vanu, and you'll become ensconced in a culture whose fetish for energy and beam weapons is rather disturbing. Decide your best is instead the New Conglomerate and super high technology will be your friend. Whatever the decision, make sure it's a careful one – each faction's survival is at stake, and every one boasts a unique pool of weapons, vehicles and abilities.

As could be expected from the world's first massively multiplayer shooter, the objective is simple – annihilate your enemies. Yet doing so isn't so straightforward. Careful snatch 'n' grab tactics must be used to seize the facilities populating 10 massive continents. Not only that, but beyond standard run-and-gun manoeuvres, you're also attempting to co-ordinate a full-blown war. You fight

"You'll become ensconced in a culture whose fetish for energy beam weapons is rather disturbing"



alongside a group of teammates, each of whom plays a specific role, and there's an entire game's worth of content to digest in the setup alone.

"With *PlanetSide*, we wanted to create an experience that would differ vastly from anything audiences had previously encountered," says producer Dave Georgeson, whose previous credits include the award-winning (and thematically comparable) *Tribes 2*. "There's this format for MMOs – they're all similar. The goal here was establishing something way out of the box that would still get your adrenaline pumping."

ROLE MODELS

Before vying for control of a persistent world that operates 24/7, you've got to create a working avatar. By spending an initial pool of character points, which can be added to as experience and greater level rankings are gained, players purchase Certifications. Essentially skill sets, these attributes let you access various pieces of hardware in the game. They fall into four categories – weapons, armour, vehicles and equipment – and a purchase here is an investment in your long-term standing. Proficiencies grant immediate access to newly learned

CV



SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

The story of Sony Online's rise to world-domination is a bit convoluted. We'll try to keep it simple.

1997 Sony Interactive Studios has an idea for an online RPG, in 3D no less. An ambitious graphics engine is commissioned.

1998 Sony Interactive, now 989 Studios, decides that maybe a PC online only game isn't really for them, and the development team on the game, now called *EverQuest*, is spun off as Redeye Inc. Redeye becomes Verant and continues development of EQ and online tank game *Tanarus*.

1999 EQ launches. Takes over the world.

2000 Realising its mistake, Sony buys back Verant and incorporates it into new entity Sony Online Entertainment.

2002 Now one of the world's leading developers of online games, SOE beavers away steadily at *Star Wars Galaxies*, *PlanetSide* and *Sovereign*, releases a couple of EQ expansions and even finds time to announce EQ II. Busy lot, aren't they?

Q&A

DAVE GEORGESON



Dave Georgeson, producer of *PlanetSide*, talks about life online, and his love of petunias.

PCZ What's the worst idea for an MMO you've ever heard?

DG An RPG in which permanent death was a possibility. To start over, you had to find two players willing to be your parents. Needless to say, it was never made – and wouldn't have worked for squat, even if it had been.

PCZ Most embarrassing online moment?

DG I was playing *Ultima Online*, when I chanced upon a twig in the middle of the road. It spoke and gave me a quest – or so I thought. Turns out the talking stick I'd found was an invisible player who'd just taken the piss out of me. It seems much funnier in retrospect.

PCZ Weirdest thing that goes on round the Sony Online office?

DG Probably the fact that the answer is 'not much.' We're actually a well-behaved lot.

PCZ Ever thought of seizing control of the *EverQuest* compound?

DG Not lately. But now that you mention it, perhaps I'll take it off the backburner. Power to the people and all.

PCZ Much appreciated. Any chance you'll spin off a horticultural sim called *PlantSide*?

DG Of course! Who wouldn't love to spend hours online cultivating a lovely bouquet? I'm particular to petunias... they're simply fabulous.



We'll take one of those, and one of those, and... say, got any more grenades?



Mano a mano confrontations are frequent, and usually only one is left standing.

capabilities and ultimately determine the part you'll play in any given battle.

You see, someone has to fend off attacking foot soldiers. Others must man the turrets and anti-vehicular armour. Still more parties have to drive vessels ranging from planes to jeeps, buggies and hoverships – and somebody has to man the gunnery stations they include. Then you've got the medics who heal troops during battle, combat engineers that establish motion sensor traps, and hackers essential for seizing control of a facility. It's a lot to manage, really, especially when you consider your station in life is not fixed.

Much of the game's appeal lies in its flexibility. Although a simple run-and-gun affair at face value, there's a lot more going on beneath the surface. Battle is constantly waging, yet assaults must be tightly coordinated to stand any chance of effect, as capturing enemy installations can demand you hold the territory for up to 15 minutes. Meanwhile, the face of the foe is continually shifting, due in no small regard to the fact that *PlanetSide* is light on limitations. Or, to put it less fancifully, you can completely change your approach, and even entire character, at a moment's notice.

"It's very different than the normal first-person shooter outing," explains Georgeson. "Most titles focus on one main objective as the impetus for play. Here, there's no single underlying goal. In this game, it's always changing."

CHOICES, CHOICES

Ditto for your character. Scattered about safe havens in the vast environments are terminals of varying shapes, sizes and variety. Some let you bind your 'matrix' to them, essentially creating a fixed spawning point. Others let you purchase combat gear. Using such interfaces, you can quickly point and click your way into a new set of armour, additional weapons, a medkit or numerous ammunition types. After all, given soft and hard targets (personnel and vehicles, respectively), you'll need to swap between normal and armour-piercing bullets alongside explosive rounds and jamming projectiles as conflicts get underway.

The choices are staggering. Pop into an EXO suit, and you'll find that you can enter into a lumbering run, leap over walls in a single bound, hold a

"There's no single underlying goal. In this game, it's always changing"

DAVE GEORGESEN
PRODUCER

vast item inventory, and access a powerful built-in armament. Go instead with an infiltration suit, and while you can't carry as much or pack more than two guns, you will enjoy partial invisibility and be able to pilot vehicles. Any number of configurations are possible, and you can save each one to a default set, which you'll quickly respawn with if you have a fatal run-in with the enemy.

Also swappable at any time are implants. Easily mappable to hotkeys, these special upgrades let you run faster, jump higher, and sustain more damage before dying. Acquire a personal shield and hits are duly absorbed. Invoke advanced regeneration and health is restored at a rapid rate. Purchase an audio amplifier and you'll hear enemy footsteps at greater volume, revealing their exact position on radar. Just be careful how often you use such special abilities – firing them up depletes a stamina bar that is also used to determine how long you can sustain a sprint.

SHOT CALLER

Naturally, a major part of the gameplay is melee



DETAILS, DETAILS

PLANETSIDE'S LOADED WITH SUBTLE NUANCES

As any informed player knows, it's the small touches that differentiate the great games from the merely good ones. And *PlanetSide* delivers a veritable cornucopia of small delights. It's sequences like the one depicted below that truly remind you you're getting your money's worth...

In the first scene, we've boarded a shuttle bound for parts unknown. Note how you sit atop the craft and watch it fly high above the pickup point. The next two snaps see our soldier careening earthward in a drop pod, ready to hit the front lines running. The visuals are so detailed, you can even see the vessel pick up heat as

it plummets from orbit. Last, but not least, we've arrived safely at our staging point. An AMS is waiting to download our matrix, so we can respawn back at base after being gibbed by whatever arsenal the enemy's had time to stockpile in the interim. Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to war **PC ZONE** goes...



It's time to bail out of the shuttle...



Weeeeeeeeeee.



Cross your fingers for a soft landing.



Now, where's passport check-in?



The school corridors looked slightly different in my day.

combat. Thrust into battle by taking a shuttle to any drop location, driving a vehicle through warp gates in a series of quick continental hops, or spawning in the thick of things from an AMS vehicle (which allows for mobile matrix binding), you'd best be ready for war. All that careful planning won't mean diddly if you're not packing the right tools for the job, not that anything's quite adequate to the full scope of your task. Let us not forget that *PlanetSide* provides support for several thousand players, meaning its titanic turf battles make *Unreal Tournament*'s 30-strong servers look positively primitive.

Look at some of the weapons at your disposal. Meet the Punisher, an all-purpose assault rifle with grenade launching capability and a propensity for automatic fire. Joining it in action is the Sweeper Shotgun, a friendly little gadget that peppers enemies within the radius of a lethal scatter pattern. Always popular is the Plasma Cannon, whose lingering burn eats right through pesky dropships and personnel carriers as quickly as it does simple soldiers. Outfit these puppies with attachments including rockets and incendiary grenades, and you've got a



Driving down the M4 this aint.

recipe for devastation that'd bring a tear to Saddam Hussein's eye.

"While I'm not one to advocate murder and mayhem," says Georgeson, "I must confess it's the spice of life in *PlanetSide*. Whom you frag, how you do it, and how far you can splatter their remains across the landscape is a matter of pride. Only you have to do it intelligently, or it'll be you they're wiping off the ground."

Cheeky remarks, yes, but the man isn't kidding. Death is a large part of the experience, with fans of the game set to be no strangers to the afterlife. Learning how to best sacrifice yourself for the most gain – whether it's territory or experience you're after – is part and parcel of the experience. Sony Online even plans on accounting for how many of your stray shots send allies into the great beyond, awarding you 'Grief Points' so that all

interested comers can heap praise upon your doorstep.

GUNRUNNERS

If the build-up behind the actual gameplay seems a bit much, it should be. The affair isn't so chaotic as it is an experiment in controlled anarchy, with charging troop teams pushing forward in waves only to die time and again at a stray bullet's hands. Mostly, you'll be screaming obscenities while running at an enemy onslaught, only to wet yourself when noticing their entire armada has changed equipment readouts, prompting a quick sprint back to base. There, it's a frenzied rush of terminal tapping, as you shift weapons, restock ammunition, and race like a marathon sprinter to access a production station from which you can quickly get a vehicle.

Afterwards, it's right back into the fray, stopping only for a second to pick up a gunner or buddy in need of a lift. Pauses in the action are few, death defying assaults upon impossible strategic objectives plentiful. The only consolation you'll have while rushing headlong into disaster is that somewhere out there in the great vastness that is the Internet, there's an even less fortunate bloke attempting to make sense of the chaos and execute a master plan. Such is the price one pays for a commanding role.

An ambitious undertaking to say the least, *PlanetSide* is rapidly rushing towards its launch date (February in the US, a bit later over here). Happily, the promise of impending public slaughter hasn't got the fan community, or the product's proud parents, down. "Everyone wants to run a war," says Georgeson. "Ever since the days of *Quake*, that's ultimately been the plan. Everybody knows about it. All companies want it. But that's a huge challenge – and exactly the reason we wanted to tackle it."

Having spent some time in the trenches, we can safely say it looks like Sony Online has risen to the occasion... even if it sometimes feels like they tackled us as well, and with an ultra-heavy exoskeleton on at that. [X]



This ain't no *Jungle Book* patrol soldier. You're lucky if you stay breathing for more than five minutes. Even the phones are huge.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pterodon
PUBLISHER Take 2
WEBSITE www.vietcong-game.com
ETA March

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A realistic portrayal of the war that scarred the US forever
- Team-based gameplay that doesn't skimp on the action
- Dense jungle environments that make for a wholly different kind of FPS
- Lots of historical detail to make it a "documentary game"
- Fantastic team AI that requires no micromanagement

It's not all action, there's plenty of room for interaction and atmosphere.

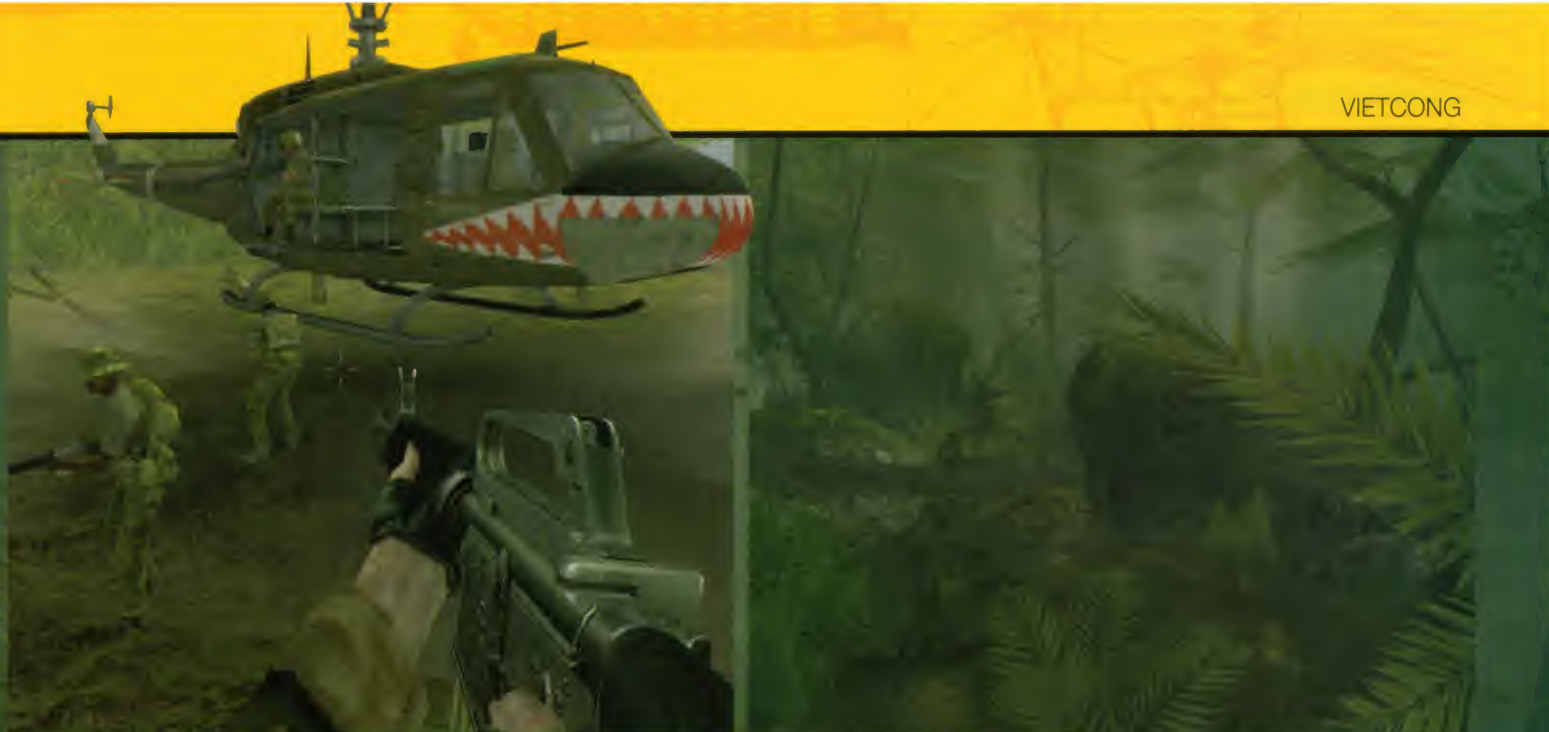
Welcome to the jungle... VIETCONG

He might be a pacifist, but *Mark Hill* would rather spend the weekend killing commies than playing protest march simulators



I'VE JUST spent the best part of three days locked in a room playing the latest *Vietcong* code, so I'm going to cut you a deal. I'm not going to go off on one about the ethics of games cashing in on a terribly cruel and bloody conflict that the US had no right to be involved in in the first place. And I'm not going to spend two hours researching Vietnam movie quotes so I can litter them over the next four pages and show off how savvy and cultured I am.

Instead I'm going to tell you about what happened while I played and how the code is coming along. How's that for a novel concept?



They choppered in the beer and turned the LZ into a beach party.

Expect lots of foliage. And we mean lots.

CV



PTERODON

They might be named after a dinosaur, but this Czech company is still pretty young. Fellow Czech developer Illusion Softworks provides financial support and takes care of the business end, leaving Pterodon free to concentrate on developing.

1998 Pterodon is founded and soon comes under the wing of Illusion Softworks

2000 *Flying Heroes* is released. Dragon-riding first-person deathmatching might be original but not very successful. Work begins on *Vietcong*.

2002 After two years in development, VC is announced, taking everyone by surprise.

COVERING FIRE

The game starts off in a chopper (as endemic in Vietnam films as young-yokel-steps-on-a-mine scenes), with you dangling your legs off the side and your new base of operations appearing beneath you. It drives home right from the start that *Vietcong* has learned the lesson so many shooters have in recent times (about bloody time, considering *Half-Life* is more than four years old). That is that easing you into the action by letting you act like a normal human being for a while is much more immersive than watching a five-minute cut-scene full of explosions and people talking.

So, you can turn around and watch the pilot, almost feel the wind coming from the rotors, listen to the chatter of your fellow passengers, and even suck your breath in as you look down (if, like me, you're afraid of heights). Once you're on the ground, you can watch the Huey fly away, admiring the beauty of it, go off and explore the barracks, shoot some of the available weapons or get on with the game and talk to the CO.

Then, it's off to the first mission, where you get to drive a jeep – keyboard to direct vehicle, mouse to move your head around – and visit a local village of tribesmen, before having

Hot and wet. Great if you're with a lady, ain't no good if you're in the jungle.

to throw yourself to the ground when a VC sniper starts taking pot-shots at you and your fellow officers. This quickly establishes something else: *Vietcong* bears the hallmark toughness that seems to come with all Czech-developed games (*Hidden & Dangerous* anyone?). It takes you a while to realise which direction the fire is coming from. Cue several deaths and reloads, plus a moment or two to get over the scream of agony that accompanies getting hit by a bullet while your heartbeat almost deafens you, and another moment to become aware

that the beating is coming from the game and not your chest.

Once you spot the ducking figure in the distant hills, there are a few more deaths before you see where your teammates have taken cover. Because there's no chance of taking out the sniper by just charging blindly. Instead, you have to wait for a soldier to lay some suppressive fire, see the sniper take cover, and advance little by little behind fallen trunks and large rocks until you're

close enough to take a shot at him. Then you can start breathing again.

ROGER WILKO

Don't worry, I'm not about to give you a blow-by-blow account of the whole game, thereby robbing you of the pleasure of experiencing it first-hand. But that should give you a taster of the level of intensity and the type of game we're talking about here.

Not that taking out a lone enemy is what you'll be doing most of the time. That's just a way of easing you into things. The typical mission has you trawling through the dense jungle, guided by a South Vietnamese soldier (that's the non-communist side, for all you history drop-outs) who knows exactly where to go and can spot

"Vietcong bears the hallmark toughness of all Czech-developed games"



LIVING AND BREATHING

TAKE A VIRTUAL TOUR OF VIETNAM

The detail in the landscape is palpable, from each individual blade of grass and tree to the kind of insects you see buzzing about. Not only did Pterodon go on a research trip to Vietnam, filming and photographing everything to get the look just right, they also employed scientists who specialise in the area's flora and fauna.

At the moment the jungle is mostly alive with sound (crickets, birds and monkeys all baying to create the perfect atmosphere), but the only wildlife I spotted were a few butterflies and the frog pictured here. Hopefully, Pterodon are putting more in as we speak, but not so many that a misguided redneck could turn it into a hunting game.



It's like a jungle sometimes (sing it).



It makes me wonder...



...how I keep from going under.

Recon. As such, your teammates have minds of their own, and act as soldiers in their situation would, without the need for constant prompting. This requires pretty good AI, and even at this early stage we can confirm that this is an area where *Vietcong* shines brightly. It's not so much that they take cover when shot at (you expect any AI character to do that now). It's more the way they take positions around you,

enemies and traps better than anyone. You have a medic to heal your wounds (although each time he can fix you up a bit less), a radioman so you can keep in constant contact with HQ, as well as a machine gunner and an engineer.

When Le Duy Nhut – that's your Vietnamese guide – spots an enemy it will appear as a red dot on your radar and you can get ready for all hell breaking loose. The air grows thick with bullets, there's shouting and swearing all around you and, unless you can pick out an enemy head among the tree bark and heavy foliage, you'll be dead or lying on the ground praying for it all to be over. That's what jungle warfare is all about.

PRETTY FLOWERS

The jungle setting is really what makes *Vietcong* different from other shooters, with Pterodon having developed the engine specifically for recreating big, dense and heavily populated environments.

At this stage, it's still rough around the edges, but you can already see how the thick vegetation turns the



"How many men had I already killed...?"

traditional corridor-hunt that defines most FPSs on its head.

In fact, because of that and the team-based element, you'd be forgiven for thinking it was more of a tactical sim


than the adrenaline-packed action game that it is. Although you are reminded at times of that other great Czech game, *Operation Flashpoint* (mostly because of the vehicles, team members and big forest spaces), *Vietcong's* engine is much better and delivers some intense, fast-paced shooting action.

The command interface is also straightforward, in a sort of simplified *SWAT 3* way. You can't give very specific orders, but this is because *Vietcong* is first and foremost a shooter, not a tactical game in the vein of *Ghost*


"The thick vegetation turns the traditional corridor-hunt that defines most FPSs on its head"



All together now: "It's a long, long road..."



Forcing the VC to do John Travolta impressions is just too cruel.



personalities. Where other team games have silent NPCs who occasionally give or acknowledge orders, here everyone yaks their head off, bitching, boasting or just making small talk. This way each member of your team comes through as a distinct individual, and you really get the feeling that you're part of a group of people.

Or at least you should. I can't comment on the quality of the acting (which will of course be crucial to whether this works or not) because the version I played only had placeholder voices laid down by game testers, somewhat detracting from the experience. The script as it is at the moment needs some work too, and not just because of the amount of swearing. Some of it sounds good, but a lot of it is over-the-top-clichéd nonsense paraphrased from Vietnam movies.

Still, the air of authenticity certainly helps matters, and once again Pterodon's research shines through.

EVERYBODY'S TALKING

The characters around you are made even more realistic by their



"OK - who's hidden my trousers?"



This month I will mostly be wearing... black pyjamas.

GOT SOME CHARLIE?

THE MULTIPLAYER MODE IS WORTH A POP AS WELL

Vietcong comes with full multiplayer support and with the recent arrival of the demo (that you can find on this month's coverdiscs) there are plenty of servers to get down and dirty on. It plays a bit like *Counter-Strike* (two sides with objectives or classic CTF modes) you can also opt to play in 'Vietnam mode', in which you lose your HUD and crosshair - they didn't have 'em in 'Nam you know.

Perhaps the most interesting multiplayer mode though is the co-operative one, where you and some friends (or more likely, a bunch of complete strangers) can take on AI enemies in specially designed levels, which will tie in with the main storyline.

The only downside is that you can't use vehicles online, although plans are afoot to include them in add-ons, along with some more urban environments.



The jungle setting makes the multiplayer unlike anything else out there.

"It's far from finished, but *Vietcong* has tremendous potential"

From the army jargon of the period to the geographical precision of each mission and Vietnamese dialogue, *Vietcong* truly lives up to its billing as a 'documentary game'.

THE SMALL THINGS

Like a lot of great games, it's in the small details that *Vietcong* really impresses. Something as simple as how you hold your weapon can suddenly become a source of wonder. Let me explain. You can hold the weapon as normal and point with the on-screen crosshair, or you can hold it up to your face by pressing the Alt-fire button, forcing you to move slower, but also bringing the target slightly closer and increasing accuracy. But the best thing is that, if you're crouched behind a fallen tree out of enemy sight, using Alt-fire will lift you just enough to rest the weapon on the

tree and let you shoot with minimal exposure. And if someone walks in front of you or you stand too close to an object, the weapon is automatically lifted out of the way. It might sound insignificant, but it's the kind of thing FPS veterans will get excited about.

There's other things too, like the way you can choose to lead the team yourself if you think the guide is moving too slowly, or how you can crawl under or hop over fallen logs (where most shooters only let you crouch or do a sort of silly long jump).

It's far from finished, but even in this raw unpolished state it's obvious *Vietcong* has tremendous potential, as much because it will provide something a bit different as because of its sheer quality. Rest assured, as soon as it's finished we'll let you know if it lives up to its promise. [A]



Do I detect the faint whiff of peroxide, silver spray paint and sweaty rubber? Must be a cyberpunk thing...



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Trilobite Graphics

PUBLISHER Phantagram

WEBSITE www.d-duality.com

OUT Q3 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Stunningly designed dark future world
- Pure cyberpunk action
- Three very different characters and gameplay styles
- Real-world and cyberspace action
- Twisting, interweaving storyline

Into the matrix

DUALITY

Three lead characters, three styles of gameplay... shouldn't it be called 'Trinity' then? **Anthony Holden** hacks through the confusion

DONE WELL, cyberpunk is a good thing. Think *The Matrix*, *Deus Ex*, *Snow Crash*... Done badly, it's one of the most heinous evils ever let loose on the world. Bleached ravers with gas masks and transparent nipple-shirts, cyber-goths in PVC strides and *Matrix* trenchcoats, *Johnny Mnemonic*... the list is long and exceedingly unpleasant.

As you can tell, the bad far outweigh the good. So you're right to be wary when I tell you that *Duality* is pure cyberpunk, a stylish tech-noir vision that pays homage to William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, Mamoru Oshii – just about any cyberpunk name you can conjure.

Normally, I'd be rolling my eyes and shaking my head right along with you about now, but this time I'm asking you to join me in a leap of faith: *Duality* is good cyberpunk.

PUNX NOT DEAD

Or at least that's how it looks from here. To be fair, the game is still perhaps a year from completion and the developers

aren't even letting us play it yet. We're only going on in-game footage, screenshots and chats with the team. But the reason we're so confident is because it positively reeks of cool. Despite being as clichéd as you like – the playable

CV

TRILOBITE
GRAPHICS

TRILOBITE GRAPHICS

Established by the former core development team of *Commandos*, this young Spanish outfit currently boasts 23 full-time staff. *Duality* is Trilobite's first game

1998 Trilobite is established by a group of ex-employees of Spain's best known developer, Pyro (*Commandos*, *Praetorians*).

2001 After working quietly for a couple of years, Trilobite catches the eye of Korean publishing giant Phantagram, which promptly signs the developer up to create an ambitious sci-fi debut.



"Done badly, cyberpunk is one of the most heinous evils ever"

Must... resist... Talking Heads... pun...

characters include a hacker and a virtual being, for chrissakes – it looks absolutely brilliant. And when you start comparing a game to the likes of *System Shock 2*, *Deus Ex* and *Metal Gear Solid*, you know something must be right.

We recently caught up with Aaron Rigby, producer on the game, to try and unravel some of the mystery surrounding *Duality*. First things first, let's get the Matrix comparisons out of the way...

"*The Matrix* has been one of our inspirations, but not the main one. Our main sources of inspiration are books such as *Neuromancer* or *Snow Crash* and RPGs such as *ShadowRun*. We've also been influenced by movies and comics such as *Ghost In The Shell* and *Appleseed* and some stuff from *Akira* and *Ronin*. But we really want to give our personal touch to the genre."

Certainly some of these influences are very apparent. The more Aaron tells us about the storyline, the more similarities we notice with *Neuromancer*.

The story begins in a futuristic New York-like city – steel grey skies, black rain, the whole works. You enter the scene as



Shooting each other's genitals is not a wise option.

three distinct characters – a hacker, an infiltration expert, and a virtual being – each highly skilled in their own domain. All three are unwittingly caught up in a plot beyond their understanding, as CAIN, a new AI prototype, battles for its own survival, using the three as unsuspecting pawns. Ringing any bells?

The plot interweaves the stories of all three characters into a single integral

whole, with control alternating between them for different missions. And this is where that personal touch comes in. Not in the setting or broad storyline, which are chestnuts straight from the cyber-pedia, but where it matters – in the gameplay.

VIRTUAL INSANITY

Each of the three played characters has a totally different gameplay style from the



Unbeknown to many, Marble Arch is a secret doorway to cyberspace.

others, and given the substantial RPG side to the game, each will also change considerably as their skills and abilities level up. Between them the variety promises to be immense.

The Mercenary is based in stealth action, but as he collects money from jobs, he can get new cybernetic implants. He's kind of JC Denton meets Sam Fisher (see *Three The Hard Way* panel).

Perhaps less familiar is the Hacker character, who's involved in a more thoughtful style of play. In the real world she's all about hacking systems to find ways around enemies – essentially solving puzzles and setting traps. When logged in to cyberspace she's much more powerful, able to employ spell-like programs to attack her virtual foes. "The Hacker will fight many different enemies in the cyberspace," says Aaron. "These fights will be full of magic and special effects."

"The programs used will have to be configured in part by the character, which means that you'll essentially program your own weapons." From what we've seen it's a little like the rune system used in *Arx Fatalis*, where different programs can be combined to produce all manner of new effects ('projectile' plus 'fire' equals 'fireball', that sort of thing). The final character, the Virtual Being, is still largely under wraps, though Aaron says that he too has a totally different gameplay style.

PHREAKY STYLE

In fact, so varied is the gameplay presented by *Duality*'s motley line-up that Trilobite is finding it difficult to put a finger on what sort of game they're actually making. They're currently hedging their bets and calling it an "adventure/RPG/ action game with a serious message and deep storyline". A bit vague, but if ever there was a good sign of ambition and innovation in a game, it's when you struggle to pigeonhole the bugger for the marketroids.

For this and countless other reasons, our hopes for *Duality* are immensely high – expect a full hands on soon. [M]

THREE THE HARD WAY

NOT ONE, NOT TWO, BUT THREE UNIQUE CHARACTERS. HERE'S WHAT THEY DO...

MERCENARY

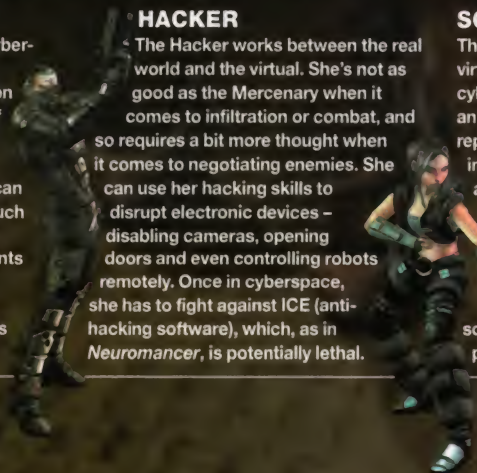
The Mercenary is a kind of Solid cyber-Snake, offering stealth action and gunplay. He's an expert in infiltration as well as combat, with a variety of physical skills (sneaking, diving, climbing, hanging) and *Deus Ex*-style implants to help him out. He can also employ a variety of gadgets such as optic camouflage and jamming devices. As Aaron says: "His implants and gear help him to work with absolute dexterity in buildings full of enemies and to achieve his goals with not much problem."

HACKER

The Hacker works between the real world and the virtual. She's not as good as the Mercenary when it comes to infiltration or combat, and so requires a bit more thought when it comes to negotiating enemies. She can use her hacking skills to disrupt electronic devices – disabling cameras, opening doors and even controlling robots remotely. Once in cyberspace, she has to fight against ICE (anti-hacking software), which, as in *Neuromancer*, is potentially lethal.

SCIENTIST/VIRTUAL BEING

The most mysterious of the three, the virtual being is an avatar in the game's cyberspace. He starts off thinking he's an avatar like any other, simply a representation of his true self (a scientist) in the real world. But slowly it becomes apparent that his actual self has been transferred to cyberspace, and that he has far greater powers than any mere avatar. "The scientist's abilities are related to the story itself," says Aaron. "He's like some sort of hacker, but much more powerful in cyberspace."



REVIEWS

THIS IS 2003



■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

▲ Hello and welcome to another year of *PC ZONE*. And what a start. In this month's reviews section we've given out two Classics, and four Essential Awards, and the year is barely a week old. Plus, with 2003 promising to be the biggest and most exciting year in the PC's history (even bigger and better than last year, and that's saying something), this promising start could well be a sign of things to come here in the Reviews section. And you won't hear a word of complaint from me. Which will make a nice change.

Splinter Cell is a game we were tracking more eagerly than an unleashed bloodhound in a meat factory, long before the first bubbles appeared in the simmering cauldron of expectation that is the games industry. Anthony returned just a few hours ago from a gruelling expedition to Canada where he'd spent the best part of a week completing the game. If you want to know what he thought, then just flip over the next page.

Somewhat predictably, *SimCity 4* failed to live up to expectations that it would take the next step in god/management games, leaving an eager and willing Paul Presley somewhat jaded at its lack of originality, if still highly entertained by its intrinsic playability. Turn to page 68 to find out more.

So if *SimCity 4* wasn't the second Classic on this month's roster, then what was? Could it be *Morrowind: Tribunal* (page 72), the first expansion for the *PC ZONE* Classic RPG *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*? Or the expansion to another classic RPG, *EverQuest: Planes Of Power* (page 74). No? Not convinced? *Combat Flight Sim 3* (page 78) then? Or *Civilization III: Play The World* (page 76)? Or *Butt Ugly Martians: Martian Boot Camp*? OK, now I'm just being ridiculous. Make your choice and see if you're right. A fiver says you're wrong. Metaphorically speaking of course, I'm not a bloody millionaire you know.



Stand aside Solid Snake, your day has passed. Sam Fisher is here in the best stealth/shooter of all time.



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. We know that occasionally

you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Vietcong



JAMIE SEFTON

Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast, Vietcong and UT2003

What are you currently playing?

What two games are you most looking forward to in 2003?

Unreal 2: The Awakening and *Doom 3*

Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic and *Doom 3*



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SPLINTER CELL
Stealth/action at its best



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RE-RELEASES
Older games get a re-release



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UPDATES
Patches and multiplayer reviews



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Battle of the online shooters

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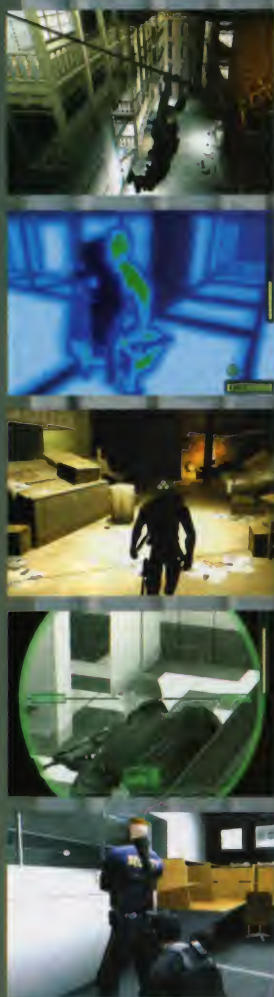
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SPLINTER CELL

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Ubi Soft Montreal | ETA: Jan 31 2003 | www.splintercell.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.2GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

It's finally here. The stealth epic that's had us writhing in anticipation for six months has arrived, and *Anthony Holden* has got a mean sweat on...

PLAY
THE EXCLUSIVE
DEMO ON THE
DISCS!



INPERSPECTIVE

Thief II: The Metal Age

Reviewed issue 119, Score 82%

Until *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* comes along in a few months, this medieval sneak 'em up is the only real alternative for stealth action on the PC (except maybe *Hitman 2*). It's old and clunky in comparison, but for a fiver on budget release it's an essential purchase, especially if you prefer your action with an olde worlde twist.

MAX PAYNE

Reviewed issue 107, Score 90%

Equally as polished as *Splinter Cell* but not offering anywhere near the variety, *Max Payne* is a hugely enjoyable faux-noir shooter with lots of slow-motion bits. For third-person action without the stealth, you'd be well advised to revisit this classic outing.



IT'S BEEN a long time since the madness last took hold. I thought I had it beat, but then again I kinda knew that was rubbish. Sooner or later it comes knock, knock, knockin' again, and you're hooked.

You know when a game has got its claws into you. The sweaty palms, the twitch at the corner of the eye. You may try to fight it, but if you're a true gamer you just know. I'm not talking about just liking a game here, I'm talking about heavy, life-consuming dependency, when every waking moment is spent either playing the game or wanting to. We've all had our moments. The wild-eyed panic. The shakes. The one where the whole world around you starts

to wobble and melt away at the edges as reality and game blur into one. When I was heavily into *Goldeneye*, I started noticing security cameras a lot, thinking of ways to take them out. I remember one day right before payday, dead broke,

better. I've just come off a three-day binge, and I'm hurting. It's called *Splinter Cell*. You oughtta try it...

SNAP OUT OF IT MAN

Huh? What's that? I'm raving? Oh, sorry about that. Must have

"Some have suggested it may even be a little addictive"

desperately flinging all the sofa cushions to the floor, hoping to make enough change for a hit of *Street Fighter*.

(Must get a grip. Got to maintain.)

It hasn't been this bad for a long time, but I've found something new, something

had another little turn. I've been feeling unwell lately you see. What were we talking about? Ah yes, *Splinter Cell*. Yes indeed, it's finally here. Splendid. After all the hype we've lavished on this game in the past six months, we can all breathe a sigh of relief – Tom



"One for the Commandant, one for the corps..."

stealth action adventure based on hugely modified *Unreal* technology and an equally mutated Tom Clancy licence. You are Sam Fisher, veteran covert ops agent

terrible secret they uncovered to get themselves killed in the first place. To avoid spoilers, let's just say it involves rogue terrorist states, Chinese generals and weapons of

■ PC ZONE ■

■ PC ZONE ■

"Go on then. I'll have a 29 and a 46."

■ PC ZONE ■

■ PC ZONE ■

■ PC ZONE ■



Clancy's *Splinter Cell* has arrived on PC and it's good. (So good, so very good.)

If anything, it's exceeded our expectations. We suspected it was going to be the finest stealth action game ever made, and I feel pretty confident

saying that it is. And yet the amount of gameplay variety, the innovation, the brilliant level design, the sheer cool factor, add up to so much more than this. Though inescapably influenced by the likes of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Thief* and

Goldeneye, *Splinter Cell* manages to evolve and expand the stealth genre and effortlessly meld it with other action styles, resulting in a pure videogaming masterpiece. Yes,

freshly recruited to the NSA's secret new division, Third Echelon. It's been a while since you were in active service (cue a short training level to re-familiarise

mass destruction, and you spend the rest of the game trying to avert a war.

That's your basic set-up. The rest of the game takes you

SEE YOU AT THE PARTY, RICHTER!

B-LIST HERO MICHAEL IRONSIDE LENDS A BADASS TOUCH TO HERO SAM FISHER

Like everything else in *Splinter Cell*, the voice acting is top class stuff. It positively reeks of professionalism, and it comes as no surprise to find out that proper actors were employed to give the game voice, as opposed to just getting Mark Hamill in. Particularly cool is the appearance of Michael Ironside as gravel-voiced hero Sam Fisher. If you're scratching your head, just trust us: you know this guy. He's one of those characters that crops up in all kinds of stuff, from complete trash to blockbusters, but only sad B-grade movie buffs and video store employees know his name. He came to fame as the skull-bursting psycho in Canadian sci-fi classic *Scanners* (appropriate given *Splinter Cell*'s Canadian origins), and has played a string of madmen, megalomaniacs and chrome-domed anti-heroes ever since. Ironside's most celebrated moment probably came as he hurtled down into an alien abyss with bleeding stumps for arms as the evil Richter in *Total Recall*. Or was it when he got eaten alive by bugs as Lieutenant Rasczak in *Starship Troopers*? In any case, you might want to delete this morsel of information from your memory before you play the game, lest the image of Ironside's balding pate somehow dilutes the effect of Sam Fisher's tough guy persona...



Buffed to a sheen.

"Splinter Cell's true masterstroke is the sheer variety and pace of the action"

a masterpiece. Some have suggested it may even be a little addictive. (Why are you looking at me? Don't look at me!)

Before you get worried though, I'm not going to just blather on aimlessly for six pages about how great this game is. I'm sure that, unless you've got the discipline of a Buddhist monk, you've already flicked to the last page and read the score. It's a big 'un, I know. And I intend to make every effort to justify it to you. (Unless the shakes kick in again.)

CRACK FORCES

Let's stick with tradition for the moment though, and have a quick look at what it's all about...

Brought to you by the good folks at Ubi Soft Montreal, *Splinter Cell* is a third-person

yourself with the techniques of stealth and evasion), but you're still the best goddamn agent in the free world. You're brought into Third Echelon to track down some missing agents, but when they inevitably turn up on a slab it's up to you to find out who killed them, and what

through nine huge missions, each broken into several sections. You're in constant communication with your gruffly avuncular commanding officer Lambert via a headset plugged directly into your subdermal implants, with updated orders and other



Throwing items brings up a handy trajectory path.

"The storyline is just grandiose enough to maintain a nicely cinematic feel throughout"

info received via a Palm-like PDA affair.

GENRE BUTTERFLY

Admittedly, with the Tom Clancy licence in place, you pretty much know what to expect from the plot. I'm not saying it's predictable – there are

plenty of geo-political plot twists to keep you on your toes – but the themes and tone are as familiar as any Tom Clancy potboiler. Let's just say you're not going to find any giant, nuclear equipped robots in this one. However, the storyline is just grandiose enough to maintain a nicely cinematic feel throughout the game, as well as justify the globetrotting nature of the missions. It works for me.

However, *Splinter Cell's* true masterstroke is the sheer variety and pace of the action.

As I've suggested, the game succeeds precisely because it doesn't limit itself to stealth-based gameplay. Take the opening moments and see just how they ease you into things. You begin your mission in a darkened yard, lurking in the shadows while guards patrol streets and

The light and shadows are truly sumptuous.

"Hello, HQ? I've changed my mind. Get me out."

nearby balconies. It's a bit of sneaking to kick off, staying in the shadows and finding your way to your destination, which happens to take you on to a roof, down a manhole and

through a duct to another rooftop. A burning warehouse is opposite you, and the only way in is by ziplining down a power cable and through an exploded widow. Then it's a mad dash through the fire, with hasty directions coming to you through your headset. Flames lick at your feet and rooms collapse all around you, and at this stage the game feels a lot more like *Max Payne* than any kind of slow-burning sneak 'em up. Using Sam's remarkable agility, the next step is to shimmy along an exposed piece of plumbing, make contact with an informant, then make your escape, shooting out skylights to clear the smoke as you go.

MOVE TO THE RHYTHM

It's an exciting set-piece to intro the game, and while you revert to sneaky stealth mode soon afterwards to dispatch an apartment full of Eastern European thugs, this is very much indicative of the tempo of the entire game. Sneak a little, shoot out some lights, pick a lock, shimmy, shimmy, zipline,

WE WANT MORE ALREADY!

EXTRA LEVELS, SEQUELS AND POCKETLOADS OF SNARLERS

There has been some talk on the Net about a number of extra levels that are in development, and whether or not they will appear on the PC. Having played the game to completion, we can say positively that there will be no new levels in the PC release. Disappointingly, the extra missions are being developed primarily for Xbox Live, the new service that lets you download new content (and play online games) through a large black doorstopper. They may or may not subsequently be converted to PC and released as a kind of mini-expansion. "The new levels are at a very early stage," says producer Mathieu Ferland. "So we can't really say yet. It's not as easy as people think to convert them across to PC." Of course it is. Get your finger out.

More promisingly, we can tell you that Mathieu and the lads are already bristling with ideas for *Splinter Cell 2* (which is, as the yanks say, a no-brainer). We tried to drop a few hints for things we'd like to see in the next game, and the team seemed to respond favourably to our idea of a throwable 'stealth weiner' for distracting guard dogs. You heard it here first. Perhaps regrettably.



Sam Fisher's job is never done.



rappe. Down the building, through the window in an explosion of glass, zap two or three unsuspecting guards, hide their bodies, dash past a security camera then drop and roll into a corner where the safety of darkness envelops you once more.

This sense of tempo is key to *Splinter Cell*'s winning formula – not only is there enormous variety of actions to perform, but it's paced perfectly as well. Just as one full-on stealth section with a strict no-kill stipulation is completed (such as a delicate mission to infiltrate CIA headquarters to locate a security leak), a trigger-happy assassination-fest awaits. Just as one frantic action set-piece closes (escape from an exploding embassy), it's time for a bit of quiet platform-style action as you

leap, climb and wall-jump your way up a windy cliff-face.

This became particularly apparent to me because of the circumstances under which I reviewed the finished code. Deadline was looming and with little time to spare I played for three days solid, and finished it, barely (though I could have spent weeks more perfecting and exploring each level). Did I get bored, frustrated, fed up? Hell no. Because I knew that

there was a completely new challenge around every corner, and that even if I was stuck somewhere (and *Splinter Cell* is a pretty tough cookie by the

"The entire stealth 'system' employed in the game works brilliantly"

way) there's always more than one way to handle every situation. In fact, the developers assure me that only one or two enemies (usually ones with a

crawlspace, making any ambush close to suicide. Luckily the ceiling is thin, and before they know it you have shot all three guards without moving an inch. Even in thermal

works brilliantly. It's similar to *Thief II* in that a light meter gauges your visibility (At 4, you're lit up like a Dutch brothel, at 1 you're a ghost's shadow). However, in this case the meter is absolutely reliable,

vision, the attitudes of panic and confusion as the guards are mown down are irresistible.

Cooler still, a later level sees you fleeing through various

and you can also create your own darkness by turning off or shooting out light-sources. Doing so is often essential in fact.



Bloody US imperialist dogs...



Picking locks is just one of Sam's talents.



Installing piss-cams is not imperative.

MISSING OPPORTUNITY



The split-jump is very cool, but under-used.

BUT WHO'S THE REAL SAM FISHER?

With a game this good, it's only ever going to be minor things that could possibly have been improved, but one or two do spring to mind. For a start, the character of Sam Fisher could have been given a bit more depth, as could that of Lambert, his humourless superior. This is something that *Metal Gear Solid* excelled at, culminating in a moment of deep (if cheesy and overwrought) conflict for Solid Snake at the end of the game. Sam is a bit more of a one-dimensional 'damn good soldier' type who follows orders without question and gets pushed around quite a bit by Lambert, and sometimes you wish Sam would just tell him where to go.

Otherwise, I could mention a few minor things I found myself wanting to do throughout the game, such as throwing bodies out windows/off cliffs rather than hiding them in storerooms all the time, or being given opportunity to use some of the special moves (the split jump!) and gadgets (the chemical flare!) a bit more. But that's really just nit-picking.

part in the plot) actually have to be killed, and almost the entire game can be completed without firing a shot. (Better make that months to perfect each level).

INSTRUMENTATION

The next stroke of genius comes from the game's many gadgets. Not only the number and novelty of them, but the expert manner in which they are incorporated into the game. Take the thermal goggles for example. When they first become available, they seem almost useless, as Sam is already equipped with Night Vision, which does a far better job of making sense of a darkened room. But then you find yourself in a sticky situation, stuck in a cramped ceiling on your way to ambush a group of would-be executioners. There is a manhole you could drop down, but the corridor below is horrendously well-lit – you'd be a sitting duck if you dropped down there, and you can't see who's waiting to goose you. Or can you? Strap on your Thermal Goggles and all of a sudden things become clear – three guards are waiting below you, just near the exit to your



"You call that stealthy? You're fired."

rooms in an embassy building, each one locked with a different security keypad combination. Only by tailing a guard (without being spotted), and using your thermal goggles to read the heat signature left on the keypad (and repeating the sequence from coolest to hottest), can you get through the doors. It's sheer brilliance, and there are around 20 other gadgets, each implemented in equally ingenious fashion.

SAFETY IN DARKNESS

The entire stealth 'system' employed in the game also

The AI awareness is also very high. I'm not saying enemies are hugely intelligent (they don't notice if their friend suddenly disappears from his post while they are off on patrol for example), but they do have a realistic level of alertness and a realistic set of behaviours once they've detected you. There are no vision cones here, no bizarre patrol patterns, no half-blind and deaf enemies. Where the *Metal Gear* style of stealth works very much as a 'game', with strict rules and each enemy encounter acting as a mini puzzle to be solved,

Splinter Cell's style of evasion is far more realistic, far less predictable, and as a result considerably more tense.

BEAT BOX

It's probably also worth mentioning at this stage the ways in which *Splinter Cell* on the PC is superior to the Xbox version, which a few of you may have dabbled with already. First of all, it is basically the same game – there's no new material here. But the few variances do have quite an impact on the overall experience.

The most immediately apparent difference is in the

photorealism of the textures. It's a truly stunning game.

The second most important change is the control system. The awkward nature of the character and camera controls was one of the principal complaints levelled at the Xbox version, but with mouselook in place this problem evaporates. To compensate for the extra ease of play, a third has been slashed from Sam's health bar.

The only real difficulty you're left with is the lack of an analogue stick to regulate speed (and therefore the amount of noise you're making), but this is neatly mapped to the mouse wheel, where you can



Better stop posing and shove that body under a lilypad smartish.

awful chore of repeating difficult passages of play over and over again, it can potentially remove some of the tension of the game (if you know you'll only lose ten seconds of progress if you die, where's the incentive to remain nervously stealthy throughout?). But then again, we wouldn't have it any other way.

it that extra sprinkle of magic? Like the humorous conversations you're always sneaking up on, in which a soldier might be spitting in his colonel's dinner as it's prepared in the kitchens, or a Chinese cop might be likening McDonald's restaurants to an insidious network of terrorist cells...



"Oooh, that burns."

visuals. *Splinter Cell* is so high in detail, and by its very nature cast in such starkly-defined shadows, that it's often hard to see what's what on the horrendous low-res of a typical TV. However, pump it up to 1024 or 1280 on your monitor, and the richness of the environments jump into focus. In the training stage alone, I was marvelling at details I never knew existed – the footprints in the dirt, the flapping of Sam's equipment pouches as he walks, the

flick between three basic movement states. Certain sections of the game are made slightly less challenging by this (especially a sequence in which you have to approach and defuse some motion-sensitive wall-mines), but otherwise it works remarkably well.

Finally, an unlimited quick-save feature has been added, eschewing the checkpoint system of the Xbox. As always, this is both a blessing and a curse. While it alleviates the

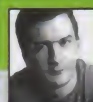


Role-play and domination can spice up many stale relationships.

BREAK DOWN

Now look at this. I'm running out of space and I haven't told you half the things I love about this game. How about the fun of putting someone in forced co-operation and using them as a human shield, the huge freedom of movement and action afforded by the interface, the split jump, the sentry guns, the optic cable, the forced retinal scanning...? Or just the sheer level of polish and the countless little touches that give

Basically, I could fill any number of pages with praise for this game. It's one of the most highly evolved and well-wrought games I've ever played. It boasts stunningly detailed and superbly constructed missions, and one of the most powerful and gratifying ranges of interaction of any 3D action game ever. Far from just a *Metal Gear Solid* beater, this is a game that every self-respecting gamer must play. Believe me, it's addictive stuff. [A+]



SECOND OPINION

DAVE WOODS

Understatement: I'm not the most experienced person when it comes to stealth shooters. In fact give me a copy of *Quake III* and a rocket launcher and I'm as happy as a pig in shit, but *Splinter Cell* has made me re-evaluate my life. First off it looks better than any game you'll have played, and the speed at which the game is played means you'll actually be able to take the time to appreciate it.

And then there's the atmosphere. I loved the original *Thief* because it was soooo tense, but it was flawed and I couldn't play it for long without becoming absurdly frustrated. *Splinter Cell* is the first true PC incarnation that combines every strand of stealth gaming into a coherent whole. It might be a linear game but when it's this good I couldn't give two hoots.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Huge variety of action
- ✓ Excellent sense of structure and pace
- ✓ One of the best looking games ever
- ✓ Superb feeling of control over your character and the environment
- ✓ Loads of innovative touches, gadgets and set-pieces
- ✗ Not the smartest enemies in the world
- ✗ Quicksaving takes away a bit of the tension

94

Almost flawless; a tour de force of stealth and action



SIM CITY 4

Paul Presley gets building in the fourth outing in this legendary strategy series

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Games | Dev: Maxis | ETA: Jan 17 | www.simcity.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

DURING the writing of this review, I took the liberty of flicking back through some old issues of *ZONE* in the name of research (yes, yes, I know. Bring back Charlie Cursor and all that. Don't waste your breath, it's never going to happen. Get over it). Namely issue 13 and Duncan MacDonald's review of *SimCity 2000*. Along with 'topical' references to Jeffrey Archer and Steve Coogan (albeit in Paul Calf mode rather than Alan Partridge), it was alarming to realise I could pretty much cut and paste the entire thing here and it would be



Prisons bring in revenue but aren't too popular with the locals.

just as accurate. It would also save me a lot of time and effort.

CASHBACK

Nothing's really changed. OK, that's not true. Maxis couldn't get away with a mere graphical update after so much time and it knows it. Hence there are a few ideas on the table. Not enough, though, but then I always have been rather difficult to please.

The biggest change has addressed the problem of

limited long-term playability. Instead of just throwing one city at you and piling on the stress until an artery pops, *SimCity 4*

the neighbours from the previous title.

It's a bit deeper than just allowing for various power deals

"If you want vaguely interesting scenery, you're going to have to build it yourself"

introduces the concept of regional play. You're now responsible for an entire map of connected cities – essentially

though. A region's cities can all interact, with one city's development able to affect another in various subtle ways.

INPERSPECTIVE

SIM CITY 3000

Reviewed Issue 74, Score 92%
Same as this, just a touch more limited and less pretty. Probably on budget somewhere if you fancy a look, but if you don't own it already, go for this one instead.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 80%
Plenty of god-like micromanaging but in a more controlled – and fun – environment. Like *SimCity* but with added vomit, candy floss and men in pink rabbit suits (or did I imagine that last bit?).



You know you're doing well if you get a fireworks display.

In practice this means you can spread out your designs, allowing middle-class suburbs to dominate one area, pollution-spewing factories another, soulless out-of-town shopping centres in a third. Connect them all with roads or rail networks and you've got quite the empire to deal with.

You can still pile everything into the one map and ignore all this if you like, but it does expand the game's basic

SOUNDS OF THE CITY

WHAT SORT OF MUSIC DOES A MAYOR-CUM-GOD LISTEN TO?

According to Maxis it's a combination of the soundtracks to *American Beauty* and *Heat* (the Michael Mann cops and robbers flick as opposed to the celebrity-fawning magazine), the collected works of Philip Glass and Michael Nyman, with the sudden juxtaposition of someone screaming into a microphone while new wave German techno-industrialists hit electric guitars with hammers in the background. The combined effect is like closing your eyes and imagining you're watching a word-free documentary about gliding on the Discovery Aspirational Impossibilities channel only to have your kid brother walk in and turn over to Kerraang! TV just as it gets to a good bit about thermal updraughts. Personally I love it, but knowing you lot, you'll probably be filling the /Music folder with your own favourite MP3s the moment it's installed.



An American beauty.

NOTHING FROM SOMETHING

There's a downside of course. Namely that this now means doing business deals with neighbouring cities is dependant on your actually building those cities in the first place. Which is something of a pain, especially when you're running low on cash, but given the vastly expanded regional aspects, is something that you can live with. You've still got the business deals and building rewards to offer long-term incentive for each individual city, so not all is lost.



It's no Wembley, then again neither is Wembley any more.

One area that could definitely have done with more thought is the creation of these regions in the first place. You're presented with two choices for a starting template – plains or water. Hmm, I thought. Landscapes awash with hills, valleys and mountains, or an island network with tropical beaches and intricate canal networks. I opted for the latter (on the basis that if my city burned to the ground I could always high-tail it to a nearby beach and sip Pina Colodas on a sun lounger) and was presented with a large square of seawater. Nothing else. Nary a palm tree or

coconut in sight. Sure, there are a handful of pre-generated regions provided (loose approximations of London, San Francisco, Berlin etc), but what possessed Maxis to take out the random map-generating program? If you want vaguely interesting scenery, you're going to have to build it yourself.

Luckily the god mode has been somewhat expanded, although it's good and bad in equal measures. Good in that there's a raft of flexibility in what you can create, that it's as simple as pie to get to grips with and that it creates lovely looking



Natural disasters provide some unwanted problems.

scenery. Bad in that the controls are nowhere near precise enough to allow you to create exactly the kind of landscape you want. You're constantly struggling to get things just how you want them. A raised hill here will invariably buggar up the valley you just placed over there – that sort of thing.

NEW YORK, OLD YORK

There are other new ideas on the table, but you keep getting the feeling these were the result of an afternoon's brainstorming session for 'cool new ideas' rather than the result of any serious analysis and development of the gaming concepts of the original.

from *The Sims*. Design by marketing, basically.

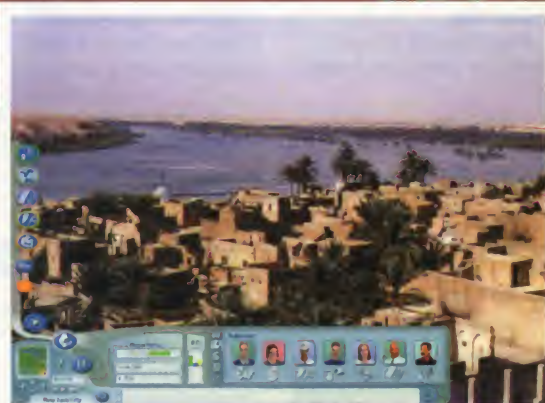
What Maxis has done is to update the previous games for modern machines, then thrown a couple of new ideas in to justify the game's existence. Same as last time, in fact. What it's failed to do – what it should have really been doing all along – is address all the limitations that sprung up when playing the past instalments. Why the adherence to a grid-based nature, for instance? Is it really beyond today's technology to allow curved roads or oddly-shaped zones? Have the designers never seen the kinds of sprawling, random messes that make up most modern European cities?

You're just constantly chasing numbers and letting the game's mathematical equations work out the results. No sense of being an actual 'mayor'.

Take transport for instance. In real life Ken Livingston gets to decide new bus routes and lanes, implement speed cameras and congestion charges, even drive the tubes making 'wooh-wooh'



MISSED OPPORTUNITY



SimCity 4: born and bred in the US of A.

DEATH TO THE WEST

Maxis intends to have downloadable regions for most American states on their website after launch. Fine if you want to play in Chesapeake Bay or San Diego, not so wonderful if you were looking to create a brand new Kabul, Baghdad or Cardiff (to name but three modern-day hell-holes). It highlights one of the fundamental flaws in the whole *SimCity* concept – namely this bias towards a western industrialised metropolis as being the pinnacle of city development. The expanded regional options do allow for some variation in thought, but ultimately all cities eventually have to teeter towards a New York theme to be deemed 'successful'. Let's globalise our thinking a little for the next version please.

“Is it really beyond today's technology to allow curved roads or oddly-shaped zones?”

Hence things like having characters from *The Sims* running around giving you feedback on the city (a gimmick that doesn't offer any information that's particularly different to that gleaned from various other sources). Or the host of new landmarks to add a bit of character to your game. Or a swish new interface that appears to have been lifted wholesale

NUMBERS GAME

Or there's the problem of micro-managing. In that there's not enough of it. If there's ever been one game in all of history that encourages the anal retentive paper pusher lurking deep within all our souls it's *SimCity*. For all of the sliders on offer, you still never get the feeling that you're making any direct decisions on how your city is being run.

noises with his mouth when he enters a tunnel (probably). Here I get to say how much money is spent on transport. It's just not enough. And the same is true throughout. There's too much vagueness associated with your options. As a result you can never be too specific about your plans because you never quite know how a decision is going to directly affect things.



Trains carry passengers and goods to other territories.



The landscape screen lets you build a vast empire.



Disasters are more varied this time, but the results are the same.

TOWN COUNSELLING

The stupid thing is that despite my moans and groans, I just can't stop thinking about it. When I'm not sitting at the PC, swearing like a bishop and throwing things about the room

with pent up frustration, I'm sat at the coffee table or breakfast bar (it's a nice life) dreaming up imaginary town plans to try out. I expect this is what being a real-life city planner must be like, without the routine drudgery of



No public services but great for attracting tourists.

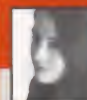
everyday office life slowly sapping your will to live as pointless office politics serve to carve up what precious little time you have left on this planet. At least as a freelancer I get to do it while trying to catch glimpses of a nipple in lunchtime *Neighbours*.

Does this mean it's any good? Of course it does. How often do you find yourself daydreaming about *Robot Wars: Extreme Destruction*? It's a testament to the basic concept of the original game that it can still have this affect on you after all these years. Will Wright is a modern day genius I tell you. Why doesn't it

have a Classic rating or a score in the 90s then? Simply because once you've cut through the gloss, it's not that different to *SimCity 3000* (or *SimCity 2000*, or *SimCity*, er, 1).

SIM AS IT EVER WAS

Nonetheless, it does grip you. I'll defy anyone to actually fill an entire region with well adjusted, effective cities rather than go down the typical *SimCity* route of starting positively, building well, running out of cash, dropping a volcano or Mecha-Godzilla thing on your Sims arses then cackling like a hyena as you watch them



SECOND OPINION

RHIANNA PRATCHETT

I'm bitterly disappointed that you can't zoom right down into your city to see your mayoral decisions in action. I never felt that *SimCity 3000* was much of an advance from *SimCity 2000*, so I wasn't expecting too much from this fourth incarnation. As Prez says though, it's still terribly addictive and all the little details really make it feel like you're governing a real living and breathing city, even if your input is limited.

It's also too Americanised for my liking, but at the same time it lacks all the fun bits that actually make America weird and wonderful, such as long roads stretching off into the distance that lead to 'the biggest ball of twine' or 'the amazing beard of bees'. Hopefully Maxis will take note and realise there is actually a lot of life and, dare we say it, culture, outside the good ol' US of A.

burn (send us a screenshot if you manage it and we'll buy you an ice cream as a reward or something), and given all of that I can only predict that online games are going to be a whole new kind of hell (no servers were up at the time of review). But it does take a tight grip and keep you coming back for more punishment, time and time again.

The old 'ain't broke, don't fix it' adage is still holding up after all these years, but eventually Maxis will need to look much deeper at the whole concept for this series to evolve any further. The regional concept is a step in the right direction, but it needs much, much more. In the meantime, think of this as *SimCity 3000* v2.0 rather than an entirely new game. Which is probably enough to justify it for most people anyway. **[B+]**

WALKTHROUGH →

IN THE BEGINNING

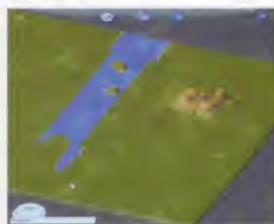
The regional play offers some interesting landscaping options, although you'll have to spend ages getting everything just right...



1 You start with a basic plain landscape, divided into differently-shaped city areas. Not very interesting at the moment, is it?



2 Pick one to start with and begin raising mountains, carving valleys and the like until things are just how you want them.



3 Repeat this with each city square, a process that will take several years and turn you into a bitter (and smelly) hermit.



4 The end results are worth it though. OK, this is one provided by Maxis, but I could do that. Eventually. Before I die.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Regional play adds to variety
- ✓ Same frighteningly addictive nature as before
- ✓ Several new ideas
- ✗ Not enough of them
- ✗ Exactly the same game as before, essentially
- ✗ Doesn't go deep enough

80

Addictive as hell, but needs development

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: TRIBUNAL

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Bethesda | ETA: Out Now |

www.elderscrolls.com/index.php

REQUIRES PIII 500, 256Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D Card

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256Mb RAM and a GeForce 4 card

**REQUIRES ORIGINAL
THE ELDER
SCROLLS III:
MORROWIND**

Keith Pullin goes in search of magic mushrooms in *Morrowind*'s first expansion pack



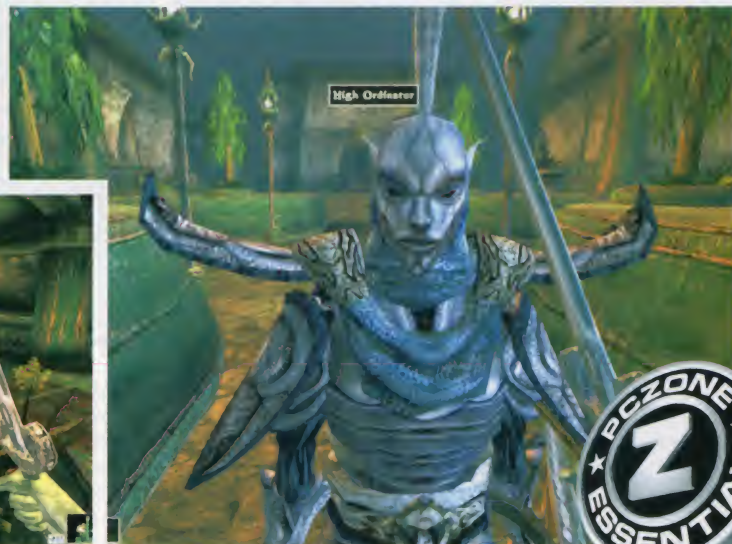
Taverns feature some dodgy characters.



Mournhold boasts a very odd species of cacti.



Goblins are just one of several new monsters in *Tribunal*.



"Please sir, can I have your armour?"

WHEN IT comes to pure escapism nothing beats *Morrowind*. The open-ended nature of the game makes it an RPG of the purest kind. Earn your bread as a bounty hunter; join the army; be a thief; live in the woods as a mushroom eating weirdo... In *Morrowind* you do what the hell you want – and that's why we love it.

INPERSPECTIVE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Reviewed Issue 118, Score 91%

With its editor, range of characters, massive world and multiplayer options, *NWN* is a truly epic game. It is a serious alternative for those looking for a classic quest-based RPG.

DEUS EX

Reviewed Issue 93, Score 94%

If *Morrowind/Tribunal* is fantasy RPG at its best, then at the other end of the spectrum *Deus Ex* is open-ended futuristic drama at its most action packed.

So it comes as a jolt to our sense of freedom to discover developer Bethesda has made *Tribunal* a relatively linear affair. All the action is confined to the city of Mournhold; a claustrophobic urban environment consisting of a palace, four districts and a variety of dungeons and

Those wishing to get the most out of this add-on can join both sides and encumber themselves with the kind of double-dealing lifestyle that would make the plot of *Mission: Impossible* look like an episode of *Teletubbies*.

However, Mournhold doesn't offer any guilds, so mushroom

performance, and if you mistype your lines you get killed) is an unexpected break from RPG tradition.

SMOOTHLY DOES IT

Tribunal also solves a few logistical problems. Firstly, the journal has been reorganised

Morrowind. Then again, those who like direction may consider this an improvement. Either way, *Tribunal* offers something different, and ultimately that's exactly what an add-on pack should do. It's low on mushroom power and a bit too brief for powerful characters, but in terms of plot and entertainment it's an essential buy. **PZ**

"Tribunal offers something different from *Morrowind* – exactly what an add-on should do"

sewers. *Tribunal* offers none of the sense of scale that made *Morrowind* such a thoroughly awe-inspiring experience.

CONSPIRACY THEORY

The story is a quagmire of political conspiracies based around the city's two main factions: the Imperial Monarchy and supporters of Almalexia (an immortal God from *Morrowind*).

When you first arrive in the city, you must decide which faction to pledge allegiance to.

and flower collecting distractions are low. On the plus side, it means *Tribunal*'s sub-quests come thick and fast and, despite there being fewer NPCs than in the original, most characters you encounter have tasks for you to perform. Combat-based quests featuring new monsters form the majority of these, but there are some interesting surprises too; performing a play for the local amateur dramatics society (where you have two minutes to memorise your lines before a

making it easier to see which quests you're currently undertaking. Secondly, the framerate has been tweaked, so the game runs more smoothly. You can now also have up to three henchmen, and you can buy pets to carry more items. Crucially, all the changes provided by the v1.2 patch are present, which means, among other things, you get to see your enemies hit points.

However, *Tribunal* is slightly disappointing, simply because it's so much more linear than

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ More linear
- ✓ Completely new city
- ✓ Improved journal
- ✓ It features henchmen and pets
- ✗ More linear
- ✗ No guilds

80

A contrasting but worthy add-on



Too many Longhorns on your pasture is a bad thing.



Soldiers at the fort stand ready for action.



Cattle rustlers can steal your cows.



Frequent stagecoaches bring new people into town looking for accommodation.



Herd your bovine gold into the corral before selling them.

FAR WEST

■ £29.99 | Pub: JoWood | Dev: Greenwood Entertainment |
ETA: Out Now | farwest.jowood.de/en/home.html

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D Card DESIRES P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin meets *The Waltons* in an RTS Bonanza

IF YOU thought all the most ridiculous ideas for strategy games had been exhausted then you thought wrong. Forget *Mall Tycoon*, *Ski Resort Manager* or *Zoo Tycoon*, *Far West* has the curious honour of being the first RTS based on running a cattle ranch. And yes, it is as dull as it sounds.

GOT THE HORN

To be fair, *Far West* does start promisingly. The tutorial leads you gently into the intricacies of

breeding longhorns (that's cows to you and me), and the novelty value of the concept keeps you hooked as you attempt to build up a successful cattle business. Hiring and managing the

also have been nice to have more of a *SimCity* element to the gameplay in the local town. Alas, the full extent of interacting with the town boils down to buying hotels to provide your ranch with

cowboy's quarters. So, cowboys riding between these three places cannot be controlled at all, which is a total pain if you want to change their orders.

the branding of cattle through to the delivery of food takes an absolute age.

Far West is about as shallow a piece of software as you are likely to find for the PC. More to the point, it's very difficult to imagine anyone but livestock farmers wanting to play it. But even they would eventually concede that getting up at three in the morning to milk a cow is probably a lot more fun. **PCZ**

“Everything from the branding of cattle through to the delivery of food takes an absolute age”

INPERSPECTIVE

DESPERADOS

Reviewed Issue 121, Score 80%
A superior representation of life in the Wild West. There's no farming as such but there are saloons and a more colourful range of characters to control.

SHEEP DOG 'N' WOLF

Reviewed Issue 99, Score 61%
Instead of being a cattle farmer, you can be a shepherd. OK, so it's a tenuous link but we like to bring you the complete farming picture.

cowboys who work on your ranch also presents an interesting initial challenge. Ensuring they are all sufficiently stocked up on beans, coffee and whisky is a tricky proposition, especially when funds are at a premium.

It doesn't take long to realise that there is virtually no depth at all to the game. Your ranch consists of very few buildings and expanding it is simply a case of buying new pastures in order to raise more livestock. It would

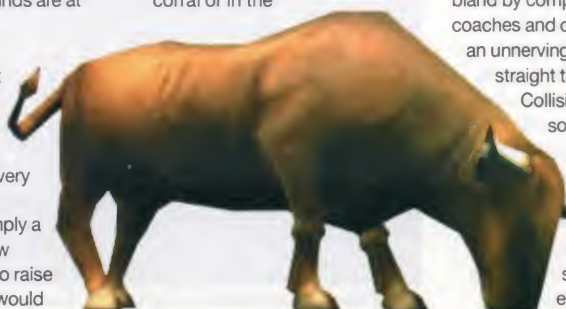
extra income, and selling your longhorns to the cattle dealers.

Controlling cowboys is another sore point. You can only allocate a task to a cowboy if he is stationed on a pasture, corral or in the

MILK IT

Graphically, *Far West* is inconsistent. The cowboys and the cattle are well animated and detailed, but the surrounding landscape and buildings are bland by comparison. Stagecoaches and cowboys also have an unnerving habit of passing straight through each other.

Collision detection is something the developers clearly have no interest in. The game is exceedingly slow, too. For some reason, everything from



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Detailed cowboys
- ✓ Initially fun
- ✗ Soon becomes quite repetitive
- ✗ Very slow
- ✗ Lack of control
- ✗ Boring backgrounds

35

West of time



Getting it on with a corroded metal thingy.



There had to be a rat in there somewhere...

EVERQUEST: PLANES OF POWER

ONLINE ONLY

REQUIRES ORIGINAL
EVERQUEST

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Verant Interactive | ETA: Out Now |
www.everquest.station.sony.com

REQUIRES PIII 400, 256Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and a 56K modem DESIRES PIII 500, 512Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

EverQuest's high-level expansion finally hits the UK. Was it worth the wait? Our resident EQ guru Chris Anderson investigates...



WHEN PLANES Of Power was first announced, the EverQuest gaming community was up in arms. An expansion for high-level players only? How dare they... claimed 80 per cent of the EQ populace. Accusations were duly thrown around the place with gay abandon: 'they don't care about low-level

players' was very common, 'EQ is for powergamers not casual gamers' was also banded about, but the big one was always 'why should I pay more money for an expansion I am too low a level to play?'.

As always, the knee-jerk reaction to a supposedly 'controversial' release proved to be wholly unfounded. Yes, in hunting terms, *Planes Of Power* is aimed squarely at high-level players, there is absolutely no doubt about that, and this review will, for the most part, assume you are a high-level player and understand the game since the expansion was made for you. The rest of you, hold tight and don't disappear. There is a lot more to the *Planes Of Power* expansion than meets the eye. Refer yourself now to the More Than An Expansion panel for

reasons why every EverQuest player needs to own this title.

WORLDS UNKNOWN

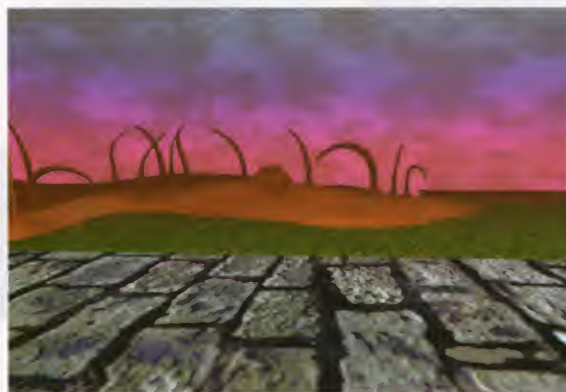
Planes Of Power introduces a new set of planes into the world of EverQuest for high-level players to explore and conquer.

There are 20 new zones in all, and each one is markedly different from the next in terms of look and feel, and in some cases, in terms of difficulty level and challenge. Given that EQ has been around a long time now, high-level players (of which there

are many) will see this as just what the doctor ordered. *Shadows Of Lucin* introduced new world content and an alternative experience system, and this kept people happy to an extent in the short term, but *Planes Of Power* is a different prospect altogether. It's not just a collection of new zones thrown together for people to hunt in. There is an ongoing main quest, which is well scripted and involves travelling through many of the new zones in order to unlock other areas that will otherwise remain inaccessible.

TOTAL IMMERSION

This is EQ's first real attempt to actually immerse players in new land content instead of just throwing them in and letting them get on with it, and it works beautifully. You won't need to



The Plane of Knowledge, as pretty as it is useful.

INPERSPECTIVE

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

Reviewed Issue 118, Score 68%

Similar in theme to EQ but hugely inferior to *Planes Of Power*. Cartoon graphics will also be off-putting for some people. Worth a look for novelty value if nothing else.

ANARCHY ONLINE

Reviewed Issue 114, Score 82%

If a fantasy setting isn't your thing, then try AO, or Neocron. There's not much between them as they're both excellent.



The entrance to the Plane of Innovation.



Hey, this is no goblin.



Give in now. We have you semi-surrounded.

"This is EQ's first attempt to immerse players in new content, and it works beautifully"

be part of one of the bigger guilds to get through it either. Many people are forming ad-hoc pick-up groups in the new zones and working together to attain items they need to go further in the quest. So don't be disheartened if some of the challenges appear out of your depth to begin with.

GAINING EXPERIENCE

There are so many quests in the new zones it would be impossible to go into them all here. Suffice to say, they are many and varied and yield some great rewards. There are countless new item drops with statistics that put items in the old

world (and *Luclin*) to shame. Gaining experience in *Planes Of Power* is also far quicker than you'll be used to. Imagine spending a whole day in Sebilis, Velk's, Chardok or even the new revamped Cazic Thule. Do the same in one of the *Planes Of Power* zones and you'll receive four times as much experience. What's more, attaining higher levels is no longer impossible for people who don't have lots of time on their hands.

I could go on about all the reasons you should buy *PoP*, but I'm running out of space. Let's just say once you get it you'll wonder how you ever got by without it. Buy it now. **EW**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fantastic new zones brimming with exciting content
- ✓ Everything you need and more in the Plane of Knowledge
- ✓ Better quests, items, weapons and armour, and faster levelling
- ✗ Significant lag on lower end PCs in some of the more populated zones

94

Absolutely essential. Stop staring at this review and buy it now

MORE THAN AN EXPANSION...

IT SHOULD BE FAIRLY OBVIOUS TO ONE AND ALL WHAT HIGH-LEVEL PLAYERS STAND TO GAIN FROM THIS EXPANSION, BUT WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE REST OF YOU? READ ON AND FIND OUT...

There are a multitude of reasons why all *EverQuest* players should own *Planes Of Power*, and each one of these reasons reside in one zone, the Plane of Knowledge. Herein you will find...



THE GREAT LIBRARY

Housed in the centre of the Plane of Knowledge, the Great Library is home to spell vendors for each and every class. Find the floor that houses vendors for your class and you will find every common spell for every spell level you have reached so far and more besides. No more hunting all over Norrath for that elusive spell which Verant saw fit to place on a vendor the other side of the world.



TRANSPORTATION PORTALS

On the outskirts of the zone you will find books that are all marked with a certain location. Left-click on the book and you will be taken to this location. This is revolutionary in the world of *EverQuest*. There are portals in this zone to every major city in Norrath. Forget about standing around in Nexus hoping a druid or wizard will come along to open a teleportation gate to where you need to go, you can go anywhere from the Plane of Knowledge. This facility is absolutely invaluable to melee types and all casters who lack their own teleportation spells.



TRADESMEN OF THE WORLD UNITE

There are vendors of all descriptions in this zone, and they sell all the items you could possibly need for trade skills, with the obvious exception of items that drop from monsters. There are also new trade recipes to be found here. The advantage of having everything available to you in one zone should be obvious.

Consider the above, and regardless of your level, if you don't think these facilities alone are worth the asking price of £20 for *Planes Of Power* then it's safe to assume you are impossible to please.

CIVILIZATION III: PLAY THE WORLD

REQUIRES
ORIGINAL:
CIVILIZATION III



■ £19.99 | Dev: Firaxis | Pub: Infogrames | ETA: Out Now | www.civ3.com

REQUIRES PIII 400, 64Mb RAM, 8Mb 3D card and a 56K modem or LAN connection DESIRES PIII 600, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection for smooth play

At last, your chance to play the world. "What world might that be?" asks **Chris Anderson**



Play The World is far more stable on a LAN than it is online.

IF EVER THERE

was a game tailor-made for turn-based play on the Internet, it would have to be *Civilization III*. Firaxis didn't think so when they originally released the game, although tenuous hints were made at the possibility of a patch appearing at a later date. The patch never appeared, but *Play The World* has, and with it comes your opportunity to pit your wits against Civ fans around the world for the first time. Playing online over the Internet or via email, or (for faster play) over a local area network, you can now take on human opponents utilising the classic turn-based mode, a simultaneous mode, or in

turnless mode. The latter option is effectively a real-time mode which sounds great in concept but in practice does not give you the precision you need to effectively manage

"The multiplayer set up still needs a lot of work"

your growing empire in the same way turn-based mode does, although simultaneous mode offers something of a happy medium between the two.

GAME ON

Game on indeed, if only it were that simple. The biggest problem with *Play The World* is the fact it appears to have been rushed out the door without even the most cursory of playtesting periods. It's very laggy for a game that doesn't exactly push graphical boundaries, and desktop crashes are way too frequent and often interrupt (or even ruin) games of any reasonable length. The fact there is already a 9Mb patch available for what is effectively a small expansion pack is something of an indication of

how thoroughly (or not) the game was tested before release.

And it wasn't only me who had problems either. Many of the players I spoke to have had trouble connecting to games set up by other players, and when they managed to get in they were quite often booted out after a short period of time.

IRONING OUT THE CREASES

There is little doubt that Firaxis will iron out all these problems with more patches in the coming weeks, but for now at least, the multiplayer setup still needs a lot of work and will almost certainly frustrate those of you who want



Which famous ruler do you want to be today?



It's playable, but only just. It can only get better.

to log on and start a game with a minimum of fuss. The real shame is it's actually quite playable and engrossing if you can get, and maintain, a steady connection.

The extra features (new tribes, new victory conditions, a new wonder) are all welcome additions but don't justify the asking price of this package on

their own. Most *Civ III* players will be thinking of buying this purely for the multiplayer capabilities, and while *PTW* has great potential once the glitches are fixed, we can only suggest in the meantime that you visit the *Play The World* forums for updates on patches and user feedback before forking out your cash. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

BLACK & WHITE

Reviewed Issue 100, Score 95%
Don't like turn-based games? Then try this stunning god-game which offers some excellent online RTS options.

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%
If massive online RTS battles are more your thing, this is the game for you.



Scandinavians get a look in for the first time.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ New units, wonders and races
- ✓ Finally, *Civ III* multiplayer
- ✗ Inexcusably laggy
- ✗ Constant crashes to desktop
- ✗ It should have been free with the original game

55

Play the world?
Well, you can try...



Don't be fooled. There's no collateral damage.

O.R.B

■ £29.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Strategy First | ETA: March 4 | www.o-r-b.com/

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES You're looking at a 1GHz machine with 256Mb RAM minimum and a GeForce 3 graphics card

Space may be very, very big, but Paul Presley is discovering a lot of it is very similar



Entering Uranus through a giant ring. Ahem.



Space strategy meets *Final Fantasy*.

IN THE WORLD of space strategy titles, one game reigns supreme. *Homeworld* was unlike anything that came before and, as such, made us rethink everything we knew about strategy games. We were in uncharted territory and we loved it. *Homeworld: Cataclysm* came along and did what every good expansion pack should do, it refined the interface, sorted out a few of the idiosyncrasies and gave us a few new missions to boot.

Problem is, *Homeworld* was nigh on perfect to begin with, so every competing title that's appeared since has appeared little more than a *Homeworld* expansion pack. It's only when someone tries something new (such as *Haegemonia*'s



Look, we can't all be number one. Let's toss for it.

colonising) that a title becomes worth a look. While playing *O.R.B* I found myself constantly writing down the similarities between the two games – from unit types to gameplay mechanics – and wondering when I'd find something that was significantly worth leaving Relic's classic for. Unfortunately I didn't find it.

TRUE FAITH

Sure, there are ideas in *O.R.B*, but nothing major, just minor alterations to the basic *Homeworld* template. OK, you've got dynamic environments, although these amount to little more

than moving asteroids. OK, there's a more detailed interface, but this just feels cluttered and unwieldy compared to *HW*'s near-invisible and instinctive offering. OK, you can issue orders while paused, but even that was fixed in *Cataclysm*.

The only thing *O.R.B* really does that is dynamically different is the addition of a user-defined tactics menu. You get to pre-determine how your units respond to threats, beyond the basic 'Aggressive', 'Neutral', and 'Evasive' settings that litter other games. It's a nice touch but hardly justifies a whole new game.

There's the story of course, quite a nice one as it happens. Two races, divided over their interpretations of a religious text, at war with each other. Campaign one sees you playing as the somewhat fundamentalist and genocidal Malus, as you almost wipe out the peaceful and altogether more tolerant Alyssian empire by the end of the game, only for campaign two to switch the focus and have you rebuilding the Alyssians as they search for a new home and a meaning behind (and a way out from) the conflict. Quite mature for this sort of thing as it happens, which is always pleasant to see.

MORE OF THE SAME

Taken solely for what it is there's nothing intrinsically wrong with *O.R.B* and if *Homeworld* didn't exist it may well have been a ground-breaking strategy title. It's extremely pretty, well presented, and offers all the strategy staples in perfect working order. The problem is that if *Homeworld* didn't exist it would be extremely unlikely

that *O.R.B* would either. Such is the debt owed by space strategy developers that mere imitation isn't really flattery, just superfluity.

O.R.B is a game that tries hard to please but is ultimately doomed by its own lack of ambition and the overwhelming dominance of *Homeworld*. Which, if it isn't careful, might also be *Homeworld 2*'s undoing. Relic take note. **[B-]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Perfectly fine strategy, if a little short
- ✓ Looks lovely
- ✓ Surprisingly good story
- ✗ Practically identical (but inferior) to *Homeworld*
- ✗ Cumbrous interface only serves to confuse
- ✗ Supposed innovations don't really innovate

75

Entertaining space RTS, just nothing new

INPERSPECTIVE

HOMEWORLD

Reviewed Issue 117, Score 90%

Breathtaking when it first appeared, it may look a little older now but it still plays better than any of the youngsters fighting for its crown. The space strategy equivalent of Alan Shearer.

HAEGEMONIA

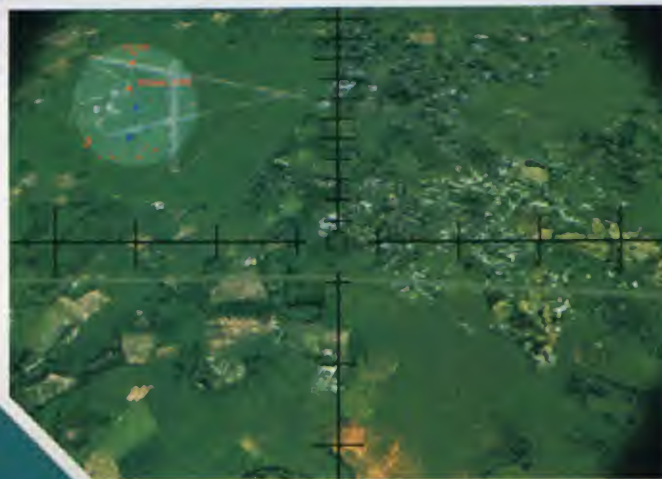
Reviewed Issue 124, Score 82%

At least tries to be different by adding a colonisation aspect. Has better research trees as well. Otherwise much the same as the others, *O.R.B* included.

"If Homeworld didn't exist it would be extremely unlikely that O.R.B would either"

BOGEY - 1777.6

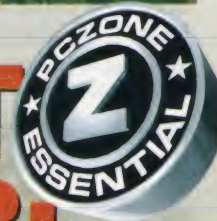
BOGEY - 1722.7



It's not all ground attack - there are... erm... sea attack missions, too.

The Dornier Do-335 Pfeil. Nice!

MICROSOFT COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3: BATTLE FOR EUROPE



■ £34.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Microsoft Game Studios | ETA: Out Now | www.microsoft.com/games/combatfs3/

REQUIRES PIII 450MHz, 64Mb RAM (128Mb for Windows XP) and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Can Microsoft's latest combat sim take IL-2's crown? Dave Mathieson investigates...

WITH IL-2 *Sturmovik* around, any new World War II sim has its work cut out to compete with the sheer realism of the best Russian game since *Tetris*. IL-2 wasn't quite everyone's cup of tea (especially as it's set on the Russian Front), and Microsoft's *Combat Flight Simulator 3* features the same sort of realism, but is attempting to bring in new elements such as a dynamic

campaign and individual pilot attributes in order to make itself a bit more accessible.

BRING OUT THE HEAVIES

CFS3 is set in Western Europe from 1943 onwards and, as you'd expect from a Microsoft sim, there's a good range of fighters to fly from the three featured airforces - the RAF, USAAF and Luftwaffe. New to this version though is the ability to fly bombers, too, as well as man the bombardier and gun positions. The only slight whinge I'd have with this feature is that they're all medium bombers, with none of the big four-engine heavies that were used in such huge numbers during WWII. Still, the bombers include the Mosquito and the B-25J Mitchell with 12 forward-firing

machine guns, so there's plenty of fun to be had. CFS3 also features a variety of types that didn't quite see combat before the war ended, ranging from the crap-looking Curtiss P-55 Avenger to the nifty little de Havilland Vampire (see Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe boxout).

The main gameplay is split into single missions, quick missions, campaign and multiplayer, but

had a pretty good editor. Still, the mission files themselves are pretty easy to understand, so it won't be long before either Microsoft or someone else puts an editor together.

DYNAMIC CAMPAIGN, ANYONE?

One much-vaunted feature of CFS3 is the dynamic campaign engine, something not currently shared by IL-2. What 'dynamic' means in this context is that

watching the frontline move gives you a real incentive to try that bit harder to avoid being shot down. Another benefit of doing well is that your pilot and squadron get 'points' which can be used to acquire better planes or give your existing one custom markings.

When it comes to flight sims, graphics are all-important as the 'simulator' bit means you want an accurate depiction of the view out of the window, as

"One much-vaunted feature of CFS3 is the dynamic campaign engine"

there's no mission editor that allows you to create custom missions. This seems pretty silly, since CFS2

the success of you and your squadron has an effect on the outcome of the campaign. While this isn't strictly accurate in that the actions of a single pilot were extremely unlikely to have much of an impact, it makes for great gameplay and

well as nice-looking planes. The graphics in CFS3 are something of a mixture - the external plane models are excellent, with fantastic lighting effects, but the cockpits are far inferior to those in IL-2. The terrain looks OK from 20,000ft, with photorealistic

INPERSPECTIVE

IL-2 STURMOVIK

Reviewed issue 110, Score 90%
Ultra-realistic, but it's also plenty of fun. IL-2 oozes atmosphere as you battle for supremacy over the Eastern Front.

ROWAN'S BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Reviewed issue 123, Score 87%
Good graphics and flight models combined with a great campaign engine and huge dogfights make this a real bargain now that it's only a tenner.



Aaahh, the Mosquito. It's sleek, fast and has lots of bombs.



Manning gun turrets is great fun, although you'll be lucky to hit anything.

"CFS3 still has enough good points to make it a worthwhile addition to any sim collection"

textures like those in *Flight Sim 2002*. These are crap from 2,000ft, when the textures get very blocky, but good at 100ft, when the detailed ground textures and trees come into their own. The terrain engine seems very PC-hungry as well, and you'll need quite a bit of horsepower to get things running smoothly. You can turn detail levels down, of course, but this makes the scenery look a lot worse.

The combat itself is pretty exciting, with spectacular explosions and other effects, and the enemy AI, while

obviously not as good as human opponents, is improved over previous releases.

The flight models seem somewhat on the lenient side though, and it seems very hard to stall, so you can keep yanking your plane round in a hard turn with no real penalty. Try this in *IL-2* or *Battle*

of Britain and you'll be spinning downwards in no time.

DA PLANE, DA PLANE

Of course, having never flown a real WWII plane (or any plane, for that

matter), I can't authoritatively tell you that CFS3's flight models are better or worse than those in other sims. But I can tell you that the

combination of graphics, cockpits and flight models in CFS3 didn't give me the same feeling of 'being there' that makes *IL-2* such a

great sim, especially when it requires some fairly serious hardware to get the graphics up to scratch. That said, CFS3 still has enough good points (the campaign in particular) to make it a worthwhile addition to any sim collection, especially once third-party mods start appearing. **[E]**

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

ALTHOUGH CFS3 HAS SOME EXPERIMENTAL PLANES THAT NEVER MADE IT INTO COMBAT, THIS HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE A LONG TIME AGO...

In the history of WWII sims, there's one title that's always guaranteed to bring a tear of nostalgia to the eye of the most hardened plane buff – LucasArts' *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe*, or *SWOTL* for short. Released in 1991, it had all the usual Focke-Wulfs and B-17s, but you also got to try out some of the experimental planes that never quite made it to the front line. These ranged from the futuristic Gotha Go-229 'flying wing' to planes that had actually entered production but never quite made it to the front lines, like the Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star and Dornier Do-335 Pfeil.

The good news for *SWOTL* fans is that CFS3 has a good selection of these exotic aircraft, making for some interesting 'what-if' scenarios.



Do any of you remember this old classic?

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ A good dynamic campaign
- ✓ You can man different bomber positions
- ✓ Experimental planes
- ✗ Graphics take a lot of hardware
- ✗ No mission editor

82

Good gameplay but not as realistic as some

BUTT-UGLY MARTIANS: MARTIAN BOOT CAMP

■ £19.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Knowledge Adventure | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 266, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card DESIRES PII 333 and an 8Mb 3D card

A martian a day keeps **James Lyon** resolutely bored



One of the eight short levels. It's over very quickly.



Tip: push the punch key a lot – you've won.

IT SOMEHOW

happened along the line, that games for kids readily became equated with basic Flash-style sub-games. Not that there's anything wrong with Flash-style sub games. It's just that, for one, you can get most of it better and free online, and no kid deserves to be constantly subjected to this

before they're considered old enough to move on.

What we have here is little more than a lengthy CGI-animated toy advert. A series of horrific Americanised characters, roundly stamped with corporate trademarks. But is it any fun? Well, in a mindless kind of stumble-home-from-the-pub

way, yes. But that's it. Play it sober and you'll be thoroughly patronised. Even if you're a kid.

The show also provides a smattering of short video clips to segue the action. The rest of the time you get a basic maze game, three similar basic scrolling shooters, three similar basic beat 'em ups and a basic *Breakout*

clone. It'd be easy to say that's acceptable because it's being aimed primarily at children, yet it is lacking even then. The characters are incidental, even the most cack-handed kid could complete it in an afternoon, and the repetition of sub-games shows a lack of imagination. Buy it now so your child can dig it out

of the attic in 2020 and get all nostalgic over it before breaking down about the futility of it all and sobbing in the corner.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

45

Fun for a while if you're five years old

INDUSTRY GIANT II: 1980-2020

■ £14.99 | Pub: Interactive Magic | Dev: JoWood | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 500, 64Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Andrew Wright gets importing and exporting with this add-on

IF AN add-on pack for an economic simulation sounds strange, it ain't. The original highly-addictive *Industry Giant II* offered 150 raw products and goods with 50-plus types of transport covering the period

1900 to 1980. The add-on virtually doubles the range of products available to buy and sell and adds 40 years to the game, taking it to 2020.

Transport is much expanded with things like huge cargo

planes, helicopters, fast-articulated lorries and high-speed and electrified railways, and there are new raw materials and produced goods. So you don't just get mobile phones and computers to make and sell – you also get crops like tomatoes, fish and rape straight from 1900. You can now take petroleum refining all the way to the forecourt rather than using it to create plastics. Or you can refine some crops to produce eco-friendly fuels made from vegetable oils.

Two new industries have been added, jewellery and coffee shops. Jewellery relies mainly on gold and silver to produce very expensive products, the good thing being that you can afford to deliver them by helicopter, aeroplane or super-fast truck. Coffee shops are essentially an entirely new industry based



A nice little sideline in farmed crocodiles and handbags...

heavily on imported tea, cocoa and coffee but mixed with traditional food products. Importing is another new creation – some maps have special import (and even export) harbours.

There are also several minor gameplay changes, most importantly the ability to dispatch long-distance trains or other transports once a month, and a range of new player logos.

A new map editor is included on the CD, although this will be freely downloadable on full release. Nonetheless, it's one of the most essential add-ons I've come across for a long time.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

82

Doubles the fun of the original



Futuristic trucks feed a thriving oil business.



The market. You'll be seeing a lot of this place.



The foundry is where your production process begins.

EUROPA 1400: THE GUILD

■ £24.99 | Pub: JoWood | Dev: 4ahead | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 400, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

We told Chris Anderson it was an RPG. We lied, obviously

THE GUILD is one of those games that appears to be frighteningly complex the first time you take a look at it. The game takes place in the middle ages and your seemingly

daunting task is to create a successful and prosperous dynasty to rival those in the town you currently inhabit, thus rising up the ranks to become the local bigwig so you can start ordering

people about and taking all their money. Sounds good, but the amount of statistical data on offer from the outset is enough to scare any casual gamer away before they even get started.

To offset this there is an extensive tutorial that takes you through every stage of the game, but you'll soon discover that buying, selling and trading is pretty much a piece of cake and while you'll enjoy it first time round, it's doubtful you'll want to replay it with a different approach. The 3D town and building graphics are pleasant

eye candy and the 2D map for navigation is also a good idea. In fact, it's all pretty solid, it's just not very exciting in the long run.

PCZONE VERDICT **70**
Entertaining but somewhat short-lived

RC HELICOPTER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Brightstar Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

THAT'LL BE remote-controlled, or is it radio-controlled? We're never really sure. Either way, this is a simulation of a simulation, a concept that has previously been discussed within these pages. Small choppers are the order of the day, and in fact they are actually tiny enough to be flown indoors, which is exactly what you

get, with locales including the kitchen, the bedroom, the lounge and of course the shitter.

There is a variety of craft on offer, and the flight model is reasonably sound, proving extremely difficult to master. In many ways this is an engine in search of a game, unless you're quite happy to fly around a house collecting stars or bursting balloons. In

the short term, it's frustrating enough to be quite addictive, but ultimately it's standard bargain bin fodder. (SH)



PCZONE VERDICT **47**

RC. Is that radio or remote controlled? Who cares...

THE TRUE BATTLE IS ONLY JUST BEGINNING™

PC Zone



Actual facts may differ.



Zola sporting a borderline mullet.

THE OFFICIAL MANAGEMENT GAME

■ £24.99 | Pub: Just Football | Dev: Smoking Gun | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 233, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card DESIRES That'll do it

Steve Hill becomes a glory-seeking Premiership fan...

DESPITE often mammoth sales, footy management games are still considered something of a niche. Even more niche is the concept of a game geared around an individual club, which is what we have here, with five 'different' games available. So

whether you're a long-suffering Manchester City fan, a recently-suffering Leeds fan, a smug Chelsea fan, an even smugger Arsenal fan, or a non-descript Southampton fan, there is a game tailored specifically towards your club.

In real terms, this involves a lot of bespoke photography, and the inability to switch jobs. Otherwise, it's a bog-standard management game, with a number of eccentricities. Graphics-free, the match engine consists of great swathes of text

that appear after the event. So, for instance, you'll score a goal, replete with brief audio commentary, then have to read about how it happened. There is also scarcely any way of telling which players are performing badly or otherwise, with a simple score out of ten given at the end of the match. Accessing information is irksome, and making comparisons is all but impossible.

In its defence, it's bang up-to-date, you can get through a season in an evening, and it doesn't involve much thought. Clearly aimed at the lower end of the market, if you've bought the club shirt and pencil case already, this could be next on your list.

PCZONE VERDICT **50**
Basic



No sign of Hank Marvin's trousers either.



And then along come the men riding pigs.

SHADOW FLARE: EPISODE TWO

■ US\$15 per episode from www.shadowflare.us | Pub: Emurasoft | ETA: Out Now

SEEMS WE neglected to mention in issue #122 of PC ZONE that *Shadow Flare* actually consists of four episodes, downloadable off the Net for US\$15 each. We messed up, as we misquoted the price last issue, which is why this second episode has scored slightly higher. However, playing part two of this sub-par *Diablo* 'em up is every bit

as painful as playing part one. It's more than a man deserves.

What's the difference between the two episodes, then? Not much. I've upgraded to warrior status and moved from constantly clicking the left-mouse button to constantly clicking the right. This activates my character's unlimited special move, which kills new enemies tolerably faster as long as I constantly consume medical

tablets and don't worry too much about any offensive/defensive tactics short of clicking until everything's dead. Not that it stops episode two being as derivative, repetitive, and as undeserving of your time as the first one. Roll on episode three. (JL)

PCZONE VERDICT **35**

SEARCH AND RESCUE 3

■ £19.99 | Pub: Just Flight | ETA: Out Now

AS THE name implies, saving lives is the order of the day here. Take one of three rescue choppers out on a series of semi-random missions to help injured motorists, lost hikers, capsized sailors and the like.

It's a novelty, nothing more. The repetitive gameplay (each mission is basically: take off, point in the right direction, press warp, fly to target and lower a rope) soon grinds down your charitable spirit to a bare nub,

and the frustratingly precise targets mean you can spend half an hour moving from one pixel to the next until your dangling frogman decides to enter the water and pick up the victims (who are by now floating corpses). Plus the graphics are shit. Churlish I know, but no one's paying me to be nice. (PP)

PCZONE VERDICT **50**



It's called a Dolphin - because it's red and has a ruddy great rotor on its head, obviously



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REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough



Apocalypse Soon.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT – GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

■ £34.99 | Pub: Codemasters | ETA: Out Now

CODEMASTERS IS certainly milking this one for all it's worth, I see. No matter, if ever a game deserved it it's *Operation Flashpoint* (or *Flashy* as we close friends get to call it). More than a year since it was first released and it's still going strong, still being played online, still being updated, still having user missions and units being made, still reigning as the number one tactical shooter/all-round military simulator in the world. I love being right.

So what's in this new edition? As with the earlier 'Gold' edition you get both the main game and the Soviet-themed *Red Hammer* expansion pack, this time sitting snugly alongside the recent *Resistance* add-on prequel and all four of the Internet upgrades (taking you up to version 1.85, stats fans,

although by the time you read this they'll probably have updated it again).

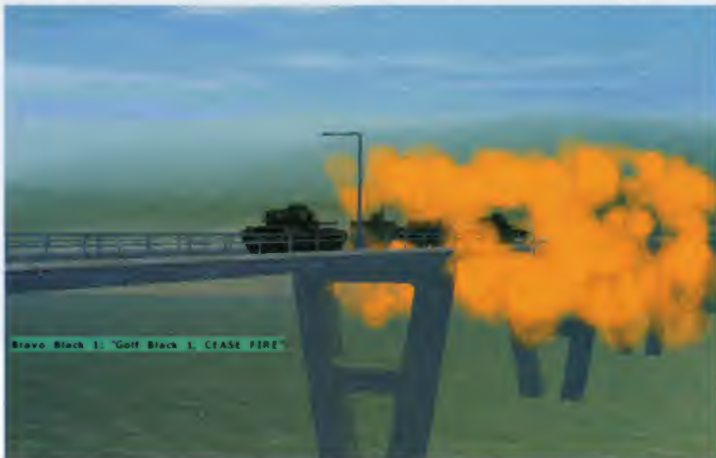
Oh yes, you also get an audio CD of in-game music which, depending on your attitude towards mullet-haired '80s Euro rockers and orchestral mood pieces, will either come as long-awaited relief or provide you with a nice drinks coaster.

So, still worth it then? Let's put it this way. Few games reviewed in the Replay section ever score higher than they did when first released. We scored the original *Flashy* a Classic 90 per cent back in issue 104. Like a fine wine (an '85 Pichon-Lalande, perhaps), *Flashy* has continued to improve with age. If you haven't bought it yet, there's simply no excuse anymore.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT

93



A Bridge Too Near.



Play *EverQuest* and you can meet girls like this.

EVERQUEST: NEW DAWN

■ £24.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | ETA: Out Now

IT HAD TO happen. There have been so many different combinations of *EQ* packages, it was inevitable one would arrive that contains absolutely everything, with the obvious exception of the *Planes Of Power* add-on which has just been released (see review on page 72). *New Dawn* combines the original *EverQuest* with *Ruins Of Kunark*, *Scars Of Velious* and *Shadows Of Luclin*, in other words the entire game world outside of *Planes Of Power*. If you are still to be convinced of the power of *EQ* as a hugely entertaining game, this is the product to buy. The *Shadows Of Luclin* expansion in particular brings not only a new continent to explore, but a complete graphical update and many changes to the user interface,

not to mention the bazaar, which has become an indispensable trade tool in the world of *EverQuest*. There are also portals in *Luclin* for returning to older continents, which makes travel much easier. It's also worth mentioning that you can play on the European servers with this product, and it's very much worth doing so if you have not played before. They are newer and less crowded as a result, and obviously you will get much less lag playing on a server closer to home. *New Dawn* then is the most complete *EQ* compilation to date, and is the perfect place to start your journey into Norrath.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT

87



Henman contemplates another defeat.



Fast, furious and fiendishly fun.

VIRTUA TENNIS

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

TENNIS GAMES on the PC are generally treated with the same disdain as films on Channel Five, but occasionally a nugget of competence comes along that bucks the trend. *Virtua Tennis* was one such exception, and went down a storm here at *PC ZONE*, prompting frenetic two-player action for almost half an hour, once we'd managed to get the controllers to work.

That was more than enough to impress us though, and the game promptly walked off with the coveted Sports Game Supertest award, as voted for by an esteemed panel of experts (ie me and a couple of other slugabeds). It was largely deserved, and it remains a supremely

playable game, having now made the smooth transition from arcade to Dreamcast to PC to bargain bucket.

Hinging around a simplistic yet intuitive control system, it's easy to pick up, with concerted play revealing further subtleties. There are a host of options and mini-games, and even if you don't like tennis (and who does?) it's top stuff, particularly if you can rope in a human opponent. But first make sure that you have two joypads with leads long enough to prevent unnecessary bodily contact. We're not animals.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

80



Nice graphics, shame about the gameplay.

STAR TREK: HIDDEN EVIL

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

THIS IS EXACTLY the kind of rubbish that has always given *Star Trek* games a bad name. *Hidden Evil* is a badly put together action/adventure, with the worst sort of simplistic puzzles and awful *Resident Evil*-style controls. The story takes place on the planet featured in the rather poor *Insurrection* movie, where you play an ensign acting as Captain Picard's whipping boy. He tells you what to do, you go and do it.

The missions are as unimaginative and dull as the developers could make them. On one occasion Picard is about to send you on an exciting shuttle assignment only for Data to decide he'll go instead, leaving

you to pick your nose with the tricorder and wonder why you wasted your money.

Both characters from the series are voiced by the original actors, but there is a strong sense of going through the motions. A poor console-minded interface doesn't help. It's no wonder it's taken the sod more than two years to appear on budget.

Unlike other *Star Trek* games though, *Hidden Evil* doesn't appear to be universally despised, so some of you may get a very basic kick out of it. Probably in the teeth.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

30

DIABLO

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

IT'S SURPRISING that this five-year-old game has only just gone down to a fiver. Nevertheless *Diablo* is still an isometric classic. Its repetitive gameplay may be frowned upon by those who didn't get just how addictive it really was, and still is in fact, since its sequel *Diablo II* is one of the biggest non-fee-based online RPGs around.

On a personal note, I loved the first *Diablo*. Even with its three characters and four levels, it was so eminently replayable – coursework was left unfinished, boyfriends left flaccid and unsatisfied all so I could kill demons long into the night. (*That's too personal* – Ed.)

Diablo's value now is arguable, especially since you can get the *Diablo II: Battlechest* for a very reasonable price these days. It's still a lot of fun, but it doesn't have the long-time lure of its successor, nor the multiplayer community. Those who are likely to buy it now probably won't have played it before, or they'll be fans of the sequel who fancy a little retro action. To them I say, go place your greasy five pound note on the counter, invest in a caffeine drip and bathe in its hack 'n' slash glory.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

75



Looks terrible, but still plays really well.

WARCRAFT II

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

NOSTALGIA IS a wonderful thing. Actually, I'm lying, nostalgia is usually little more than a distorted and over-romanticised view of the past, especially when it comes to games. Let's be realistic, as much as we loved playing the likes of *Warcraft II* when they first crawled out of the evolutionary pond which spawned the RTS genre back in the mid '90s, we'd be hard pressed to find anything worthwhile in them now. For starters, graphics do count, and *Warcraft II's* boast that it features Super VGA graphics at 640x480 is a bit like an aging Casanova bragging about having a 2in penis in a room full of 6ft Amazonians. Pointless.

So onto the game, and what a basic mix of clichés it is, especially in light of the recent release of its stunning, four-race-epic sequel. Orcs battle Humans over two campaigns in an attempt to gain control of the land of Azeroth (which I think is in Wales, but I'm not completely sure). The AI is basic and the graphics resemble greasy pizza stains on your monitor. Back in 1995, I was impressed. Now I'm just bored. My advice? Save your five quid, and use it towards buying the excellent *Warcraft III* instead, and to hell with the nostalgia.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

60



Don't rub your eyes...



...it really does look this bad.

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

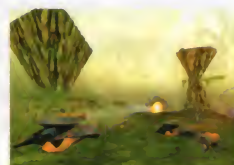
We're on a New Year's diet this month, which means we've cut down on the Christmas extravagance and put ourselves on a strict regime of controlled portions of healthy pap. The downside of this of course, is that there are very few leftovers this month. Still, lazy eaters that we are, there are still some scraps to sift through.

Ah, but if discarded morsels taste as good as *Battlezone 2* (Xplosiv, £9.99), then perhaps things aren't as bleak as I may have originally thought. This was the first review Dave 'Editor' Woods ever wrote for *PC ZONE*, giving the 3D action/strategy game a gargantuan 87 per cent. Problem was, the game disappeared from sight faster than a peace protester at a rifle convention. Still, while the graphics are more aged than a sun-dried pensioner, the engine runs so smoothly that the FPS action is a joy to play, while the RTS elements remain intuitive enough for even the most ardent strategy game hater to pick up in a matter of minutes. So we still like this one, yum, yum (78 per cent).

Not faring anywhere near as well is *Wizards And Warriors* (Xplosiv, £4.99), a role-playing game done so much by numbers, you could teach little children to count with it. In a quest for the magic Mavin sword (not a good start), you'll come across some very standard combat, made stupidly fiddly by an infuriating interface. Forget it (40 per cent).

Finally on the reheated-meal dinner table is *NASCAR 4*, a superbly authentic if predictably monotonous racing game, which has the honour of calling itself the second best *NASCAR* game on the PC (after *NASCAR 5*). And for that it earns itself a princely (70 per cent). Still hungry? Well tough, as that's your lot for this month. After all, we are on a diet you know.

Martin Korda



Battlezone 2



Wizards And Warriors



NASCAR 4

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

"The Age Of games have always had a strong online profile and Mythology is no exception"



AoM is one of the best online RTS games around.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY v1.01

MULTIPLAYER

PATCHED

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Ensemble Studios | ETA: Out Now | www.microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology | Players: 2-8

REQUIRES PII 500, 128Mb RAM, a 16Mb 3D card and a LAN or Net connection **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, a 32Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Rhianna Pratchett goes god bothering online

RUSHING, the art of surprising your opponent with a quick yet lethal attack before they've got their act together, has always been a carefully honed tactic in the *Age Of* community. Experienced players even time unit creation down to the second, and I really hoped that *Age Of Mythology* would help stamp out this questionable art. But the bastards are still there, bombarding the forums with their smug little equations for taking the fun out of a game.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

Although the underlying mechanics of AoM bare a resemblance to the previous games in the areas of economy balancing and unit creation, Ensemble Studios has added a lot of features to spice up the gameplay, especially in multiplayer. For a start there are only three main sides, all be it with their own factions, depending on your deity of choice, so more work has gone into making sure the sides are more defined and balanced than those in *Age Of Kings*.



Make sure you build up a prosperous village before embarking on any major military campaigns.

The Greeks play more like an *Age Of Kings* side, they are strong and reasonably fast, a great choice for beginners, but a bit boring when compared to the other powers. At first glance the Egyptians and Norse may look like the weaker choices, and in truth they do take a lot more dedication to master and exploit. However, in the hands of an experienced player, they can both be extremely effective.

The ability of the Norse to build structures without the need for peasants along with the Egyptian's free-build feature on basic buildings makes them a golden choice for rushers. But the most important thing for those thinking of embarking in some online combat is to learn to defend against such tactics, as

the longer games are ultimately more satisfying, as well as being a visual feast. The sheer delight of seeing your Norse Nidhogg dragon embarking on an airborne battle and trouncing fire-breathing Egyptian phoenixes is a sight that strategy gamers live for.

KEEPING THINGS UNDER CONTROL

Interface wise there doesn't seem to be as many options for tweaking the features of your game as there were in *Age Of Kings*, such as starting at different ages, but the variety of maps are much more interesting with verdant green Greek landscapes, sandy Egyptian oases, snow-covered Norse tundras and even the blackened, lava-strewn Hades levels.

The *Age Of* games have always had a strong online profile and *Mythology* is no exception with an abundance of servers available. However, in this case the single-player is such a great experience that it still edges over the multiplayer. Unfortunately, as is often the case, multiplayer has brought out a few minor bugs, mostly in the areas of upgrades not appearing to effect units, but it has already been patched and hopefully Ensemble will continue to do its best to keep the game as bug free as possible. [A]

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 123) **90**

MULTIPLAYER SCORE **88**

The gods are smiling

NEW WORLD ORDER v1.2

MULTIPLAYER

£24.99 | Pub: Project 3 Interactive | Dev: Termite Games | ETA: Out now
www.p3int.com | Players: 2-32

PATCHED

REQUIRES PIII 900Mhz, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb Memory Card **DESIRES** At least 1.2GHz processor, 512Mb RAM and a GeForce 3 minimum

It's been a month or so and Paul Presley's wondering what happened to the revolution



"That's right boys, you just line yourselves up for me and I'll do the rest."

SO WHERE is everyone? It's approximately a month after *New World Order* hit the shelves and you can count the number of servers up and running on the fingers of one hand. Naturally, the reliable folks over at Jolt are keeping the British end up, but otherwise it's looking as barren as visitors to a fertility clinic out there.

To be expected I suppose. *New World Order's* launch wasn't the smoothest. At the time of writing we're on v1.2 and things are a little, but not that much, more stable than they were to begin with. However, version 1.3 is said to be ready for delivery fairly soon, promising much needed fixes to memory

usage, network code and overall performance, which should stabilise things a little. There's also talk of gameplay fixes in v1.4 following that.

ONE OUT OF THREE

Which is a sign that one of the three things I indicated the game would need to survive in my review last issue is being taken care of – continued developer support. What it's not getting, as I said, is very much player support. In some ways this is both a curse and a blessing. A curse in that if no one starts buying it, it'll never reach a playable state. A blessing in that the few dozen or so players online at any one time

mean that you start actually getting to know the people you're fighting with (something that's never happened throughout *Counter-Strike's* over-populated lifespan). A quick Tim Westwood-style shout out to the rest of the *NWO* forum homies in da house (or whatever you say these days).

GUNS AND ROSES

Actually, online play (when you can find it) isn't too bad overall.



"Hey everyone, there's a naked woman behind that wall."

"It's still too early to tell if *New World Order* really is the new *Counter-Strike*"

There's more of a sense of teamwork than there ever was in CS, players actually help each other out in a fire-fight rather than things feeling like a giant game of British Bulldog with guns. The Fallout Bomb mode is a nice touch (defused bombs can be rearmed again, adding to the tactical fun for both teams), and the promotion/weapon upgrade system, while not dissimilar to CS's monetary set up, works nicely enough to make getting bigger guns seem like a real reward for playing well.

The community is growing, albeit slowly, but continual expansion is going to depend on how effective the netcode in v1.3 really is. There are already more than enough dissenters on both the official *NWO* forums and the Usenet groups to bring the whole house down if it fails to deliver.

At this stage it's too early to tell if *NWO* really is the new *Counter-Strike*. Something tells me it's not going to achieve that level of success, we're all just too weary of CS rip offs these days. My suggestion is to beef up the co-op game. The future's all about sharing, man. [X]



This will hurt an awful lot, honest.



Didn't Indiana Jones do this?

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 124) **69**

MULTIPLAYER SCORE **70**

Better, but still needs work



THE CONTENDERS

BATTLEFIELD 1942
ISSUE 123, 91%
(MULTIPLAYER SCORE)



QUAKE III
ISSUE 86, 89%



RTCW
ISSUE 114, 92%
(MULTIPLAYER SCORE)



MEDAL OF HONOR
ISSUE 115, 94%
(MULTIPLAYER SCORE)



COUNTER-STRIKE
ISSUE 119, 86%
(V1.5 SCORE)



AMERICA'S ARMY
ISSUE 121, 85%



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
ISSUE 122, 90%



THE JURY

MARTIN
'CAMPING'
KORDA



PAUL
'WATER
PISTOL'
PRESLEY



MARK
'HAWK-EYE'
HILL



ANTHONY
'SORE-LOSER'
HOLDEN



DAVE
'AWOL'
WOODS



ONLINE SHOOTERS SUPERTEST



The **ZONE** boys might get a good hiding online, but they always get the last word.
Mark Hill catalogues the moans

WE'VE COME a long way from the first grey, square deathmatches of *Doom*, but it's still all about running around with a gun killing other players. And it's still the most intense visceral experience available to PC gamers.

There's a massive hurdle to overcome in multiplayer games: we're all used to being the hero of the show in single-player, but online you're most likely to end up being a low-level grunt. Because unless you play obsessively, other people are much better. And the competition is just as intense between the games themselves. Read on to find out which is the best.

Dave: Shooters, they're about the only games people play online.

Mark: What, apart from all those huge RPGs?

Martin: And all the RTSs?

Dave: Alright, alright.

Martin: They're the easiest to play online. You just go in, have a quick game and come out.

There's all the levelling up in RPGs and in RTSs you have to set up long games.

Paul: I just end up dying every five seconds.

Martin: It's easy to play the games, not to stay alive.

Dave: That's the problem with online shooters. Unless you play with people you know you end



Battlefield 1942's wide choice of vehicles makes it a hit.



Deserted sandy beaches? Sounds like paradise.



up either not feeling part of the game or getting your arse kicked. Because there's people who just play all the time.

Martin: That's what happens in the free-for-alls. We're pretty good players... (sniggers all around) ...but we play lots of games for short periods of times. A lot of the people on there just play the same game every evening, and get so good they

just put people off. You should have leagues like in *Tribes*, so you can see what level people are at.

Paul: Yep, you need some sort of handicap system.

Anthony: You can't blame them though. There's nothing like going on a server and just dominating.

Mark: No, it's rubbish. It just gets boring.

Dave: But it's what happens, because it's mostly blokes playing, just waving their cocks around and showing off.

Paul: Yeah, it's all immature unreconstituted machismo-led.

Mark: There's a big difference between team games and deathmatch though.

Martin: But even in teams it just deteriorates because they all want to be heroes.

Anthony: It just turns into team deathmatch.

Mark: That's why people get into clans, to have proper games.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

Martin: You actually have to have team work because of all the things you have to achieve.

Mark: But everyone tends to go off on their own anyway.

Dave: It's not a hardcore team game, so you can go off if you want.

Paul: But it's so much better when people work together.

Martin: When you pull something off as a team it's fantastic.

Anthony: It loosely works even if no one is co-operating because it's always obvious what needs to be done.

Paul: It's a very good game, it just needs better players.

Martin: It's incredible the amount of vehicles you can use.

Paul: It's the only game ever where you can command a destroyer, a bomber, a zeppelin...

"It's a very good game, it just needs better players"

PAUL PRESLEY
BATTLEFIELD 1942

Mark: The scope of it is unbelievable. In a way it goes a bit too far, because it can't do everything perfectly. The maps are really big and really good though.

Paul: They seem to be designed for 60 or 70 players, but you only get about 20, so it doesn't work quite as well as it should do.

Mark: The slow-down would be unbearable with more players though.

Martin: It would be better if you had specialists. So your role would be pilot or tank driver or whatever.

Mark: That would make it more of a team game. But the point of the game is to give you all these toys and let you go and play with them.

Dave: You never really need different skills. Driving is quite easy.

Martin: The bombers can be quite hard.

Anthony: Doing a strafing run in a fighter plane and not crashing into the ground is very difficult.

Paul: It is becoming the new *Counter-Strike*, but it needs better netcode.

QUAKE III

Martin: It's utter reaction gaming, which is why it's so much better on a LAN than online.

Dave: But it probably runs better online than any of these newer games.

Anthony: It has brilliant netcode.

Mark: And it gets updated all the time.

Paul: The only time I've ever enjoyed *QIII* is playing *Proball*.

Dave: We still play deathmatch in the office, but it causes so many arguments.

Martin: There's no enjoyment anymore, it's just pure hatred. Anthony nearly killed Dave once, I took out a phone and a hard disk, Dave took out three mice...
Mark: The reason that happens is because it's so intense, you get so immersed in it nothing else exists.

Martin: And you get the best faces when people are playing.

Dave: You can't counteract age though, because it's all about reactions.

Anthony: That's just a poor excuse because you're not as good anymore.

Mark: It's not about age it's about practice.



The lag problem means *Quake III* isn't the online king.



Wolfenstein's multiplayer is where the action is at.



Teamwork is essential.



Ooh, that smarts.



Anthony: You're not that old Dave...

Dave: I know what I'm meant to be doing but the information doesn't get from my brain to my hand as fast as it used to.

Anthony: That's not age, that's alcohol abuse... (laughs)

Dave: Playing *Quake* does give me the shakes. Especially when you get in a duel with someone really good. At the end my hands are just shaking.

Anthony: But the best thing about the game is the railgun, and you can't use it online, because of the lag, even on broadband.

Mark: There's always that tiny delay that you don't get on LAN, so hitting someone isn't instantaneous.

Martin: It's the one where lag is more noticeable because it's so fast.

Dave: I don't know, *UT 2003* is probably even faster.

Mark: The thing is, people turn down all the graphics in *Quake* to make it faster, but

in *UT 2003* the graphics are kind of the point of the whole thing.

Dave: I'd get pissed off that they spent so long making such a great looking engine and then people play it on wireframe. And it still looks good. It hasn't dated.

Martin: It's just the really hardcore players who are just desperate to be better than anyone else.

Paul: This game brings out the worst in people.

Mark: It's just pure confrontation.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Dave: It looks absolutely unbelievable if you have a good enough video card. It almost looks too good, because it gets quite busy, and you can confuse a big power-up with an enemy.

Mark: I found I was getting killed by someone behind a power-up, but the thing was so huge I couldn't see them.

Anthony: I was thinking exactly the same thing.

Martin: What I liked about *UT* was that it wasn't *Quake*. It was different and slower. But *UT2003* has been sped up to make it more like *Quake III*. Even the sniper rifle is more like a railgun. And it's so fast you can't really appreciate how good the graphics are.

Dave: When it comes to

deathmatch it's all about refining what's already gone before, better graphics, faster

gameplay... *Quake III* introduced jump pads which we all hated at first and then loved. *UT 2003*

doesn't really do anything new. **Martin:** It doesn't excite me like *Quake III* does. And the weapons

haven't really improved. **Paul:** *Quake's* weapons have always been better.

Mark: Which is weird because the single-player *Unreal* always stood out for its weapons.

And *Unreal II* has some of the best and most original ones I've ever seen.

Dave: There is the Link gun here.

Martin: But you need team work to make it work, because a number of people have to shoot at the same time to channel the power.

Mark: Is that what it does? It's like *Ghostbusters* then.

Martin: And what the hell is that mode where you carry a ball around? It's abysmal.

Anthony: It's popular online.

Dave: I didn't like the ball thing either. The engine is amazing though, and I think *Unreal II* will be awesome. This leaves me a bit cold.

Martin: It's fun, but not inspiring.

Anthony: The speed is more *Quake*-like, but the maps, the size of the levels and the detail in the environment makes it a very different game. *Quake* is pretty much corridors and flat surfaces. Here you hide behind trees, run over hills and so on.

Martin: In the single-player game you upgrade teams in a *Speedball* sort of way. You should

have something similar online.

Anthony: I think they're aiming for that eventually.

Mark: It's gonna be huge with all the mods coming out soon though.

Dave: Definitely. There's a *Star Wars* one that looks unbelievable.

Martin: The bots are cool too. They act more like people.

Mark: But until all the mods come out it doesn't quite beat *QIII*.

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

Dave: Like *B1942*, the single-player is almost worthless, but multiplayer is amazing.

Mark: It was an inspired move to come up with a completely different multiplayer, rather than just the usual deathmatch and CTF bull.

Dave: And it's proved so popular that the expansion is a stand-alone that improves the multiplayer.

Anthony: And the single-player will be based on the online mode.

Martin: I like the fact that you pick a

"It looks absolutely unbelievable if you have a good enough video card"

DAVE WOODS *UT 2003*

It's fast and it's gorgeous, but *UT 2003* doesn't really do anything new.





Medal Of Honor carries its single-player popularity over to its online games too.

"The beach landing is amazing in single-player but not online"

PAUL PRESLEY
MEDAL OF HONOUR

role to begin with, making you feel more like part of a team. Like Ant just ran around healing everyone.

Dave: And they kept it quite simple. In *Team Fortress Classic* you needed to know what was going on.

Anthony: I think we're all going to be playing it again when the expansion comes out.

Martin: It forces you to not go

off on your own, if for example your job is to blow a hole in the wall you've got everyone waiting for you to do it.

Dave: Unlike *Quake III*, you don't get pissed off playing *Wolfenstein*.

Mark: It doesn't have much of a WWII feel to it, does it?

Paul: It's set in WWII?

Anthony: I think it's good.

Fun German accents. When

the demo came out this is the game that weened us off *Counter-Strike* for a while.

Martin: We just played that one level over again, the beach landing. It's the best map by far.

MEDAL OF HONOR

Anthony: Nowhere as good as *Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer. I wanted to get into it because the single-player is so good, but I didn't.

Paul: I thought it was excellent. It slows the action down a lot.

Dave: I really enjoyed it. It feels more realistic, but people got bored with it because there's too much sniping.

Mark: I quite like that, so it didn't bother me. In fact, I probably prefer it to *Wolfenstein*.

Martin: You creep around a lot more, where in *Wolfenstein* you're always in the thick of the action. The telling difference is the Omaha beach missions. In *Wolfenstein* your heart is racing and you're really into it, in *Medal* nothing much happens. Just some snipers and a few bullets.

Paul: The beach landing is amazing in single-player but not online. I actually prefer *Battlefield 1942*'s Omaha level.

Mark: The multiplayer here is more like a bonus to the single-

"For most people it's just a free game. Thanks very much"

MARK HILL
AMERICA'S ARMY

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



IT'S SEQUELS AND EXPANSIONS FOR YOU

Two of the best online games in this Supertest have add-ons coming up. *Enemy Territory* is the fab looking expansion to *Wolfenstein* that introduces new classes (including a spy that can disguise himself in enemy uniform) and structural damage to buildings (blowing up bridges and the sort). Meanwhile, *Battlefield 1942* has wasted no time in preparing *Road to Rome*, which will add Italian campaigns and a bunch of new vehicles (including the British mosquito twin-engine fire bomber). Check out our First Look on page 8.



Delta Force Black Hawk Down should continue the series' enduring online appeal, and become popular with a much wider audience too, while we're still waiting for the potentially incredible *Planetside*, the first massively multiplayer shooter.

With id seemingly dropping out of the online race (the *Doom III* engine, also powering the Raven-developed *Quake IV*, only supports up to four people at the moment) it's *CS: Condition Zero* that is getting us most excited (check out our massive preview on page 42). When it comes out it's sure to revitalise our favourite game and get us all playing regularly again.

player anyway, rather than a game in its own right as it is in *Wolfenstein*.

Paul: It is very co-operative though.

Dave: It's obvious in the expansion packs where the strength of each game is: *Wolf* is mostly an online add-on, while *Medal*'s is single-player.

Mark: The weapons in *Medal* feel much better.

Dave: And it takes fewer shots to kill someone, which gives it that realistic edge.

AMERICA'S ARMY

Dave: I'm just not interested.

Paul: I love the concept, with the training levels you have to pass first and everything. I just couldn't get it to work online. All the pings were really high.

Mark: I despise the idea of the army coming up with a game as a recruitment tool. But as you'd expect it's backfired on them, because for most people it's just a free game. Thanks very much.

Dave: You're not going to want to join the army by playing it. That's bollocks. You just want to shoot your training officer in the head.

Paul: You get sent to jail if you do that. And you're just stuck in a cell until you quit the game.

Anthony: You have to just stand there running a cup up and down the bars. But it stops people from doing stupid things again. **Paul:** I don't know how realistic landing in a parachute with a sickening crunch and walking away is though.

Mark: You don't die quite so often.

Anthony: I found the training extremely tedious.

Mark: I liked it. And it looks great, because it uses the latest *Unreal* engine. And it's very much a team-based game. You don't last two seconds with a gung-ho approach.

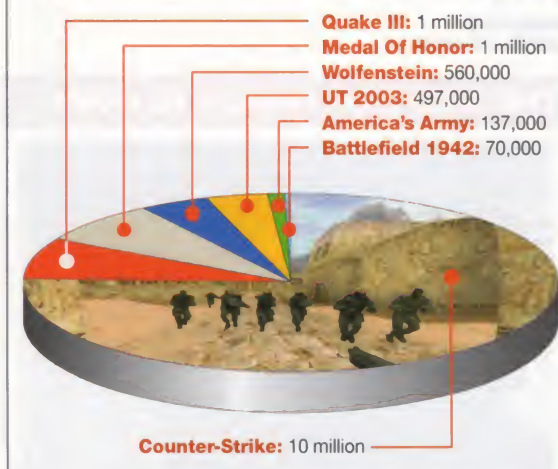
Martin: Someone at Csports.net was monitoring all the servers in the world to



It's free, it looks good, but *America's Army* isn't quite there yet.

WHO'S PLAYING WHAT

HERE'S HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE PLAYING EACH GAME EVERY MONTH THE WORLD OVER



see what people play in each country. And there was one server running *America's Army* in Iraq. So maybe it wasn't such a good idea.

Mark: They must have been disappointed that you always see yourself as the army and the enemy as the terrorists.

Anthony: Surely someone has hacked into that by now.

Paul: It still needs a lot of work.

Dave: I can't see the army just throwing money at it all the time.

Mark: I think it's really good. Very tactical and with a few excellent maps. But it needs more maps and less bugs. It's very popular online, but considering it's free and how good it looks it hasn't really taken off.

COUNTER-STRIKE

Mark: It's the most enjoyable game here, but I am getting sick of it. It's not its fault, but you can't play one game for three years.

Dave: If we got a bunch of people we knew together and had a 6v6 game it would be as good as it ever was.

Martin: We've kind of lost sight of how much we loved it because we haven't played it extensively for a while and when we do it's against readers who kick our arses.

Dave: I think *Condition Zero* is going to revitalise it. The engine will be much better.

Martin: We need to remind ourselves of just how many hours we spent playing at lunch times and after work, every single day for years.



Too old? Try telling it to the millions who still play CS.

Mark: One of the reasons for that is just like *Quake III*, at heart it's quite an arcadey shooter. For all the realistic weapons, you jump about and run while shooting, so it's all about skill.

And it's just as immersive. And if both teams play it properly, nothing can touch it.

Paul: From a historical stand point it's the best. But it's too long in the tooth, we've played it too much and it's been hacked to death. You can't find a server without cheaters anymore. We need something different.

Mark: Yeah, *Condition Zero*.

Paul: No, a different concept altogether.

Dave: Well, *Battlefield 1942* is almost that.

Martin: The great thing about CS

is the maps are quite small and you can have massive shoot-outs in bottlenecks, flashbangs and grenades going everywhere. And you don't get that intensity in any of the other games here.

Paul: But it's always the same handful of maps and everyone knows what to do, so it's the same over and over again.

Dave: Seventy five per cent of all online shooter games being played are CS, and of those 75 per cent are Dust.

Mark: Well, it's *Dust_2* now.



THE WINNER IS... COUNTER-STRIKE



IT'S AN OLDIE BUT A GOODIE. YES, IT'S STILL THE BEST

We might have played it to death and grown sick of the rampant cheating online (and the fact that everyone is better than us now), but *Counter-Strike* is one of the most seminal PC titles ever.

"It's the game I've most enjoyed online," says Dave, "and I'd still play it against people I know." Martin agrees: "Although we've kind of grown tired of it in its current form, it's still the most entertaining of all. And no game has taken up so much of my time." Mark is another long-time addict and observes that although "all the games here are excellent, CS is extra special." Before adding: "*Condition Zero* can't come soon enough."

The dissenters opted for *Battlefield 1942*'s innovation in a field of run-and-shoot deathmatches. "I won't go for *Quake III*" says Anthony, "because it's the one where online lag affects the gameplay most. I'd have to go for *Battlefield*, because it's a bit different and you can fly planes and shit".

Battlefield 1942 is also Paul's favourite "because it has added something new." Even he had to admit though that *Counter-Strike* deserves "a lifetime achievement award". And so the oldest and most popular proves to be the deserving winner.

THE VERDICT

IT'S ANOTHER TOUGH DECISION FOR OUR BRAVE LADS



DAVE
Counter-Strike
UT 2003



ANT
Battlefield 1942
RTCW



MARK
Counter-Strike
Battlefield 1942



PAUL
Battlefield 1942
Medal Of Honor



MARTIN
Counter-Strike
RTCW

BEST GAME
RUNNER-UP

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[illegible]

● 1997年10月1日現在、日本に約10万人の中国人が在住している。そのうち約5万人は、中国からの移民で、約5万人は、中国からの留学生で、約5万人は、中国からの労働者である。

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HARDWARE

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION



■ HARD WIRED Steve Spence

And so the New Year begins, a year of new widgets, gadgets and upgrades, all of which promise to take your gaming to 'the next level'. You're not alone though... We're aware of the never-ending struggle to keep your PC on the same level as the Deep Blues and ASCII Whites of this world and we've shrugged off the new year haze and hangover, shed the excess Christmas pounds and buried ourselves deep in the nitty-gritty with a plethora of new tovs for your perusal.

Sometimes I have to remind myself we're not all about kit though. With our monthly news so dominated by CPUs, GPUs and soundcards, it's nice to have something completely different this month with huge rumblings at the core of the Windows scene, and the final arrival of the hallowed DirectX 9. As these developments begin to gain speed, you can be sure we'll keep you apace with things, and if I manage to sneak it past Mr Woods maybe the odd bit of news from 'dark side' of the OS world, with a little on the new face of the Open Source community too. See you next month.

“Rather than use DirectDraw 2D, Longhorn will use your 3D card to render a whole range of visual effects and improvements”

FAREWELL WHISTLER, HELLO LONGHORN

Windows XP is over a year old now and looking a little long in the tooth. It's time for the next big thing

WINDOWS XP HAS been a bit of a mixed bag. Since upgrading our test systems we've experienced less stability issues and hardware problems but, after changing the Telly Tubby-esque backgrounds and Fisher-Price default skins it's sometimes hard to appreciate the difference between Microsoft's newest offering, and that which came before.

The thing about Windows XP, originally known by the codename Whistler, is that Microsoft wanted to do much more with their new operating system, but with constraints such as the average system spec, they weren't able to deliver everything they intended last year. Now, however, the picture is quite different, with a proportion of gaming PC's shipping with DirectX8.1-compliant hardware, and an increasing number of computer owners making the leap past the 1GHz mark.

The original successor to Windows XP, codename Blackcomb, is due sometime in 2005, but we've just found out about an intermediary product, due later this year, codenamed Windows Longhorn.

GET THE HORN

Looking at the screenshots, the differences might not be immediately apparent, but Longhorn is much more than *Windows XP Second Edition*, making as significant a leap from XP as XP did from Windows 2000/ME. The user interface is built around a new

XML-based front end in Explorer (XML is a new unifying language that will cut down on the number of applications running, which means less bugs and more stability), and there are also special application-like interfaces, that give you the ability to perform tasks like burning CDs at the push of a button. The desktop itself has a new addition in the form of an XML sidebar which replaces the Start Menu with Mac-style OS X dock functionality.

These interface changes are a great deal more deeply rooted than a few tweaks and interface adjustments, though, with the introduction of the new 'Desktop User Experience'. Rather than use rather limited DirectDraw 2D interface to render Windows, Longhorn will use your 3D card to render a whole range of visual effects and improvements regardless of what you're doing.

HOW MUCH?

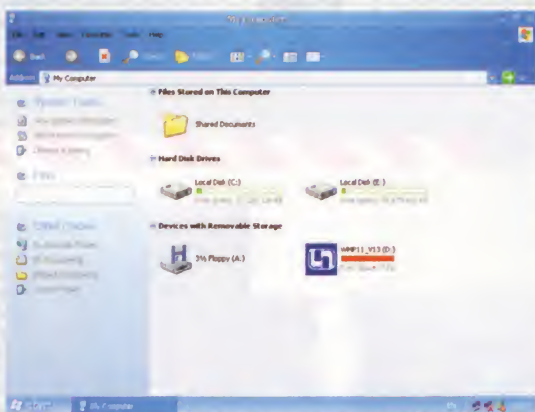
The downside is that you're probably going to need a new PC to run it, not only because of the graphics but also because of new security features. With piracy and hacking on the increase, an initiative lead by Intel called the Trusted Computing Platform Alliance has devised a security model which prevents unsavory individuals from tampering with commercial applications. The Microsoft side of this initiative is known as Palladium, and for you to be able to install Longhorn on your system, you'll need Palladium-compliant hardware. With no sign of this from any companies as yet, the first instances of Longhorn might only be available pre-installed on new PCs.

Some of the benefits are clear – modern day viruses and Trojans will be stopped in their tracks on Longhorn as they will lack the signing and certification needed to execute on these new PCs, and this could also signal the end of spam emails. Basically, any malicious hacking in the future will have to be far more sophisticated.

So, Longhorn is looking bigger, better and much safer than any previous platform, albeit at a cost. As ever, we'll keep you up to date with any major new developments.



The next version of Windows is almost here.



It's as far from XP as XP is from Windows 2000/ME.



Application-based interfaces provide shortcuts to tasks.



MOBILE GAMING
Checking out next-Gen platforms



REVIEWS
The cream of gaming hardware



DEAR WANDY
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BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit, the lowest prices

IT'S HERE...

DirectX 9 has been released, so why are we still waiting?

SINCE JULY we've been showing you a sneaky glimpse into the future of PC graphics courtesy of DirectX 9 and now, three betas and two release candidates in, Microsoft's newest gaming API has arrived with little or no fanfare.

The reason for this is that while, for the first time, Microsoft has managed to meet its own deadline, nearly every DirectX9 game, and the WHQL

drivers required for their support, are lagging well into the new year.

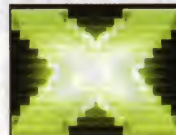
One of the few manufacturers to provide a separate driver bundle for Microsoft's new API is ATI Technologies, which released its RC0 beta drivers during the public beta, and while they're stable enough for running the ATI demos, the Catalyst 2.4-based files have already been

superseded by a new Catalyst 2.5 set for DirectX8.1. This means that unless you're desperate to see the sports car or Animusic demos running in realtime, it will probably be better to wait until the non-beta updates arrive, if not the actual DX9 titles to use them.

So, while we had high hopes of some fantastic sights with which to kick off the New Year, it's been a bit of a damn

squib. Fingers crossed over the next couple of months, and hopefully manufacturers will get their houses in order and get some WHQL certified support online.

If you do fancy a tinker, the update is a little under 10Mb and it can be grabbed from www.microsoft.com/directx, though be warned that once installed, a DirectX upgrade can't be easily removed.



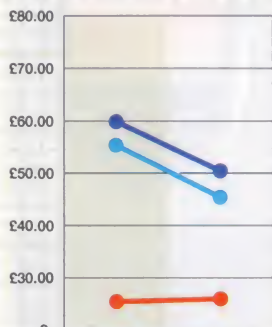
This is the sort of graphical eye-candy DirectX 9 is capable of. Now we just need games to show it off.

PRICEWATCH

Check the latest price chart and make sure you don't pay over the odds

MEMORY

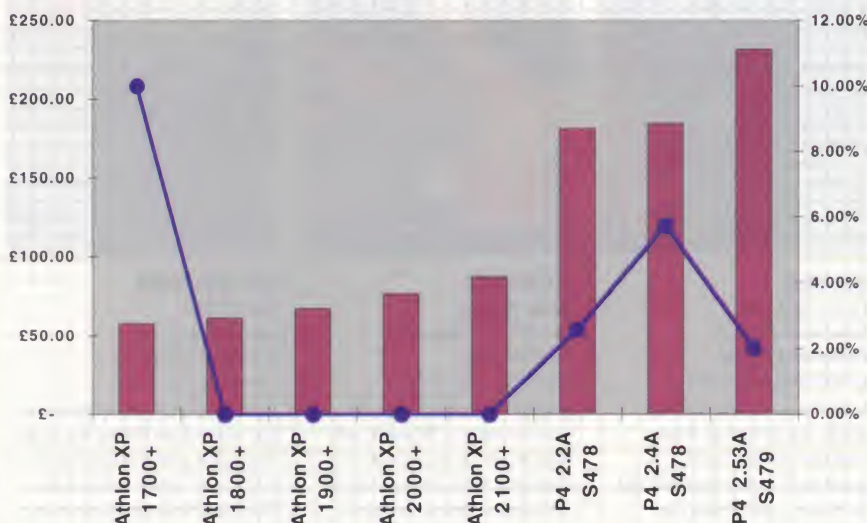
The price of PC133 RAM has stayed exactly the same as last month down to the penny but it's so low we can't really see anything else getting chopped off. The good news is that you can get either PC2100 or PC2700 around £10 cheaper than you could last issue.



Price per 256Mb RAM:

- PC133 SDR
- PC2100 DDR
- PC2700 DDR

PROCESSORS: PRICE AND PERCENTAGE DROP



PROCESSORS

All quiet on the processor front this month with no new releases to shift the price points of existing

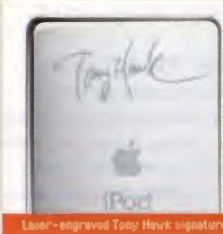
hardware. The split between AMD and Intel is still a pronounced one, with Intel sticking to its guns over pricing

and clinging on to the fact that in terms of stability and reliability it still offers the premium product. Let's see how long that lasts.

SNIPPETS

CELEBRITY SKIN

As if the Apple iPod wasn't expensive enough, Apple has just released a limited edition model of its top-notch MP3 player with a hint of celebrity. For an additional £49 on top of the normal price, you can have an iPod etched with the



signature logo of one of four celebrities, Madonna, Beck, No Doubt or Tony Hawk. You'd have to be pretty sad to want one, but who are we to stand in the way of gratuitous cash-ins?

SAPPHIRE PRO ULTIMA

When we first got hold of the ZM-80 from Zalman last year and fitted it to a GeForce4 Ti4600, one ATI manufacturer, Sapphire Technologies, cooed over the passive cooler like crazy. Three months and one deal with Zalman later, and it's snaffled our find for its own ill-gotten gains. Now it's announced a modified version of its Atlantis Radeon 9700 Pro – the Sapphire Atlantis 9700 Pro Ultimate. With a chromed version of the ZM-80A, the new card only runs marginally warmer, but totally silently. Stock should be available early this year and you can expect to pay about £50 over the traditional fansink-based card.

ADSL2?

Just when you think you're surfing on a '133t' connection something faster comes along. You might think 512Kb is enough, but certain tech-heads disagree, and they're getting ready a standard which will provide upwards of 20Mbps over existing BT copper lines. They're not talking dates yet, but with similar requirements to existing DSL and ever improving ranges, our Internet connections could soon be quicker than the PCs they're connected to.

VIA HYPERION

As if getting their houses in order for the New Year, all the major manufacturers seem to be rolling out significant software updates for their hardware, and VIA is no exception. Historically VIA has provided a suite of files known as the 4-in-1's and now it's taken things up a notch with Hyperion. You can get it from www.viatech.com.



GAMES TO GO

NOKIA 7210E

■ Manufacturer: Nokia
Price: £99.99
(on contract)
www.orange.co.uk

THE 7210 has to be the least 'geektastic' device we're looking at this month, and in many ways is going to be the de-facto standard in a year or so. Full MMS capabilities and a unique look make it more of a lifestyle phone than a work tool, but it's Java capable, which also means you can download games directly from the web to the phone and play on its backlit high-res colour screen. It might not be as impressive as the 7650 or SPV, but this is a phone you can take to the pub, without looking like an über-geek.

PCZONE VERDICT 74

Setting the standard and looks cool with it



QUARANTINE

Price: Variable
Developer: iomo
Publisher: DBi
www.dbi-play.com

This is a pseudo-3D game à la *Monster Maze*, revamped for the digital generation. Stuck in a huge spaceship, alone, you choose a piece of equipment (map, teleporter, oxygen mask) and dash through 25 levels of blue aliens against the clock. Each item adds a different element to the game, which adds replayable value, and the simple control linked with the four-way pad makes it eminently playable.

PCZONE VERDICT 79



SCOOBY DOO

Price: Variable
Developer: iomo
Publisher: DBi
www.dbi-play.com

Scooby-Doo is a combination of puzzle and platform game. As Shaggy you search for clues around increasingly complicated levels trying to guess who the culprit is and finally capturing them to see if your suspicions are correct. Rather than a quota of lives or energy, the game ends when the yellow-bellied Shaggy gets too scared, something, which can only be overcome by, you guessed it, Scooby Snacks!

PCZONE VERDICT 72



NEW SKOOL SKATER

Price: £5.00
Developer: Blue Sphere Games
Publisher: N/A
www.bluespheregames.com

One of the things to lend itself to any fledgling format is the humble platform game, and in a roundabout way that's exactly what *New Skool Skater* is, albeit with a slight twist. Pitted against levels of giant insects, you have to jump, shoot – you're armed with re-inforced ping-pong balls – and skate through levels collecting coins. Collect enough coins and get an extra life, the rest, as they say, is elementary.

PCZONE VERDICT 75



Special thanks to iomo for a sneak peek at their mobile gaming titles.

NOKIA 7650

■ Manufacturer: Nokia
Price: £199.99
(on contract)
www.orange.co.uk

WHILE most of the attention given to the 7650 over the last few months has focused on its imaging capabilities and in-built camera, what really makes it stand out from the crowd is the Series 60 operating system and Symbian backend. There are tons of home-grown applications and commercial games available which give you something to pass the time during those boring train/bus journeys and in some cases add features to the phone, such as full-motion video capture and an answerphone for the mobile itself.

PCZONE VERDICT 84

Great operating system and applications



SNAILS

Price: US\$11.95
Developer: Syntact
Publisher: PDAMill
www.snailsgame.com

Based around three clans of snails, the game has three chapters where you have to guide each of the three families to victory. Completing the different levels unlocks weapons for the multiplayer mode, which you can play on one device or between phones over TCP/IP.

PCZONE VERDICT 77



GEOPOD

Price: Variable
Developer: Fathammer
Publisher: tbc
www.fathammer.com

Imagine a visually dumbed-down version of *Wipeout* and you've got *Geopod* down to a T. Featuring three tracks and five 'pods' or vehicles, the game lends itself well to the directional stick of the phone and multiplayer options on Bluetooth finish the package off nicely.

PCZONE VERDICT 85



STUNTMAN

Price: TBC
Developer: iomo
Publisher: iFone
www.ifone.com

Stuntman puts you in the role of the stunt driver racing top-down through a series of breakneck stunts and action sequences. Pulling off each stunt gives you time to advance on to the next, and gradually through, each of the four episodes. It may be a tad simplistic but it's great fun.

PCZONE VERDICT 80



You love games, you want to play them 24/7... So what do you do when you leave your house? Steve Spence has the answers

A TYPICAL view of gamers is that you sit at home 24 hours a day playing games in grubby boxer shorts, pausing only on odd occasions to fire up another pot noodle. It's bullshit

obviously – everyone knows that you have to leave the house every month to pick up your copy of *PC ZONE*. So what do you do when you've left the confines of your four walls, leaving

behind your high-spec PC and Internet connection? Fear not comrades. The times, they are a changing, with a swathe of new mobile devices now sporting colour screens and games letting

you keep up your gaming habit. We've looked at the whole range, from the Java-enabled phone to top-spec PDA goodness, and a couple of smartphones thrown in for good measure. Enjoy.

SPV

■ **Manufacturer:** Orange
Price: £99.99 (on contract)
www.orange.co.uk

ORANGE'S new baby, the SPV smartphone, is essentially what you get when you squeeze a device like the iPaq into a case a little bigger than the 7210. Feeling much sturdier than the Nokia, this new Windows Smartphone 2002 powered handset has a pile of preloaded applications including a full HTML web browser, MSN Messenger and Windows Media Player. Put a selection of 64K WMA tunes onto an SD or MMC card and stick it into the side of the phone and you can play back through the built in speakerphone or supplied stereo handsfree.



TENNIS ADDICT

Price: £10
Developer: Hexacto
Publisher: Handango
www.handango.com

For tennis games you need a fast, responsive controller – exactly the opposite of what most phones are designed to provide. And although *Tennis Addict* is playable, with semi-realistic ball motion and a good range of opponents, it doesn't really come close to what we'd hoped, in many places feeling limited by the controls – give us a copy of *Pong* over this any day.

PCZONE VERDICT 57



INTERSTELLAR FLAMES

Price: £5.00
Developer: Xen Games
Publisher: Xen Games
www.xengames.com

Interstellar Flames sets you against a whole invading force, the remainder of your planet's defences being offline. One by one you have to fight over the motherships, taking out attacking craft and destroying their shield generators and weapons. It might not be the most original of plots, but it's an enjoyable blast, and at only a fiver a great addition to the phone.

PCZONE VERDICT 78



REBOUND

Price: free with the SPV
Developer: Ideaworks 3D
Publisher: Orange
www.orange.co.uk

Rebound comes free with the SPV from Orange, but as a commercial standalone offering on devices such as the iPaq it deserves a mention. Starring Geeza a 'megatalete', the game is a cross between pinball and *Speedball*, throwing a metal ball to score points and defeat enemies. It takes a bit of practice using the D-pad of the phone, but once you get into things, proves to be frenzied fun.

PCZONE VERDICT 71



PCZONE VERDICT 81

High-powered set up with handy applications

IPAQ 3970

■ **Manufacturer:** HP
Price: £485.00
www.hp.co.uk

THE 3970 iPaq is brimming with gadgets, which make it stand head and shoulder above the competition. With a transreflective screen, picture quality is unparalleled, even at extreme angles. The specs are equally impressive, with a 400MHz XScale processor and 64Mb of RAM and a SD/MMC expansion slot in the top. The unit even features a new infrared module which, with the supplied software, turns the PDA into a universal remote control. It might be a tad expensive, but if you want the perfect all-round mobile companion, this is it.

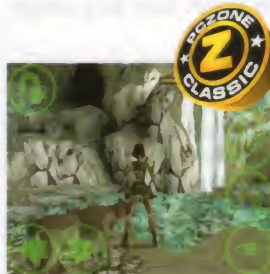


STUNT CAR EXTREME

Price: TBC
Developer: Fathammer
Publisher: TBC
www.fathammer.com

Born of the same stable as *Geopod*, *Stunt Car Extreme* is the four-wheeled alternative to the *Wipeout*-clone racer. The game looks and feels like the Amiga classic *Stunt Car Racer* and overall it's fast, enjoyable, handling very differently to the ships in *Geopod*. We love the idea of using the touch sensitive screen of the PDA to provide analogue acceleration as well.

PCZONE VERDICT 87



TOMB RAIDER

Price: US\$29.95
Developer: ideaworks 3d
Publisher: Eidos
www.eidos.co.uk

True to the original game, this iPaq-only release uses both the d-pad and screen to control Lara, and even though it's on a tiny 320x240 display, the moment when the T-rex comes thundering through the Jurassic forest is just as scary as when you played it on your desktop. It's expensive, and extremely memory hungry, but there's little out there that can better it.

PCZONE VERDICT 90



VAMPIRES INC

Price: TBC
Developer: iomo
Publisher: TBC
N/A

Vampires Inc lets you play out your part in a war between a secret vampire society and an ancient vampire lord. It's a bit like *Seventh Guest*, but due to the limitations of current devices, control rotates around a multiple-choice system, with each selection progressing the story until death or victory. Probably the best-looking of all the games we looked at.

PCZONE VERDICT 81



PCZONE VERDICT 90

The king of PDAs and a superb buy

P3000 WIRELESS

■ Manufacturer: Saitek | Price: £39.99 | Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.co.uk

Mmm, comfy and responsive

EVERY TIME a new console comes out, someone tries to recreate the controller for the PC, and normally it's a total disaster. That each new console ships with a differently designed joypad hints that the likes of Nintendo aren't too sure about the best set up, a fact compounded by Microsoft which, only a year into the Xbox's life, revamped the controller with the newer S-Pad, designed for people who don't have the same hand size of a lard-arsed yank.

One of the few controllers to stand the test of time, and a variety of hand sizes, is the humble PlayStation pad, and the P3000 from Saitek is the wireless brother it never knew. The overall size and layout of the pad is pretty similar, with dual analogue sticks and a slightly flimsy D-pad, but only two shoulder buttons – the other two have been moved next to the four buttons on the right-hand side. The pad itself operates on a rechargeable cell, two of which are supplied out of

the box and while you frag with one you can charge the second via the USB base station. In the centre of the pad is a small LCD screen which reports battery life, and the mode that the pad is currently running.

With rubber grips it's pretty comfortable to hold and even though it's wireless, the controller is extremely responsive, though some slightly peculiar things can happen when the battery runs out. You can reprogram the buttons and use two controllers at once on two different operating frequencies.

We like it, and if you weren't lucky enough to get it in your stocking during Chrimbo you'd do well to see if you can grab yourself one in the January sales.

JOYPAD



**PCZONE
VERDICT** **85**
A solid pad with some great ideas

K7N2-L

■ Manufacturer: MSI (Micro-Star International) | Price: £89 | Phone: 020 8813 6688 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

A cheap, entry-level board that can compete with the big boys

MOST motherboards we've looked at recently have been top-end offerings aimed at hardcore gamers with top of the range systems, mainly because that's the direction things seem to be moving. With several months before the next rush of new toys though, the usual suspects have been distilling these new components down into more sensibly-priced boards, one of which is MSI with its first nForce2 board.

This is the only nForce2 board MSI produce without the integrated graphics chipset, but with more than a tenner's change from £100 it's actually cheaper than the original nForce product. It supports the new 333MHz FSB Athlon XPs and

has a Dual DDR memory controller supporting up to DDR400, along with AGP8x and USB2.0 – by specs alone it's a great entry-level motherboard.

As with all the other nForce2 offerings, the K7N2-L uses a Hypertransport interconnect

between bridges, which means the memory and CPU buses can be overclocked without running any of your other components out of spec – an instant winner if you're a beginner in the area, and with the thermal protection added in the recent changes to

AMD's motherboard compliance it would be pretty difficult to kill your CPU too.

The only sacrifice is the sound. To keep the overall price low, MSI has opted for the slightly more simplistic nForce2 MCP, which means no SoundStorm 5.1 audio. Instead the integrated sound is

only 2-channel, so if you're planning on using anything more than headphones it's well worth using your old soundcard in any upgrade, especially if it supports more than two speakers.

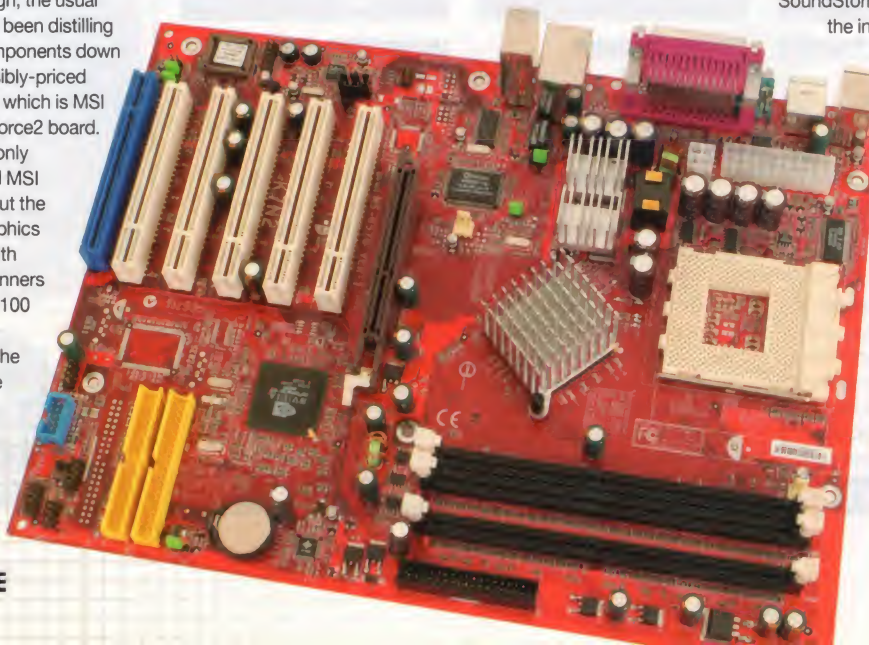
Performance is bang on the money with the ASUS board we've currently got in our Best Performance



bracket in our Buyer's Guide, so it's not really a tough decision.

If you're in the market for an AMD motherboard and can't afford any more than £100, this is the board to get. If you're willing to spend an extra £20 to £30 for additional features including Firewire, 5.1 sound and Serial-ATA, you should sink your money into the ASUS.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **85**
Budget brilliance



P4G8X DELUXE

MOTHERBOARD

■ Manufacturer: ASUS | Price: £163 |
Phone: N/A | www.asus.com

Finally, a top P4 board for the mainstream

WHILE INTEL and AMD battle it out head to head for the top performance crown, they appeal to very different audiences. The Pentium 4 and the accompanying RAMBUS memory is an expensive option, but it's also king of the bandwidth stakes. Couple it with the extremely high speeds of the newest P4s and Intel sits firmly in first place.

With news of AMD shooting for the top spot with its new Athlon 64 (Hammer) line, Intel needed to get back into the mainstream price/performance bracket quickly. The Granite Bay chipset is part of the solution. Originally designed as a workstation chipset, many manufacturers including ASUS and Gigabyte have now produced boards aimed at enthusiasts, and this is the first, the P4G8X from ASUS.

Very similar in features to the ASUS KT400 A7V8X, it offers Serial ATA, Gigabit Broadcom

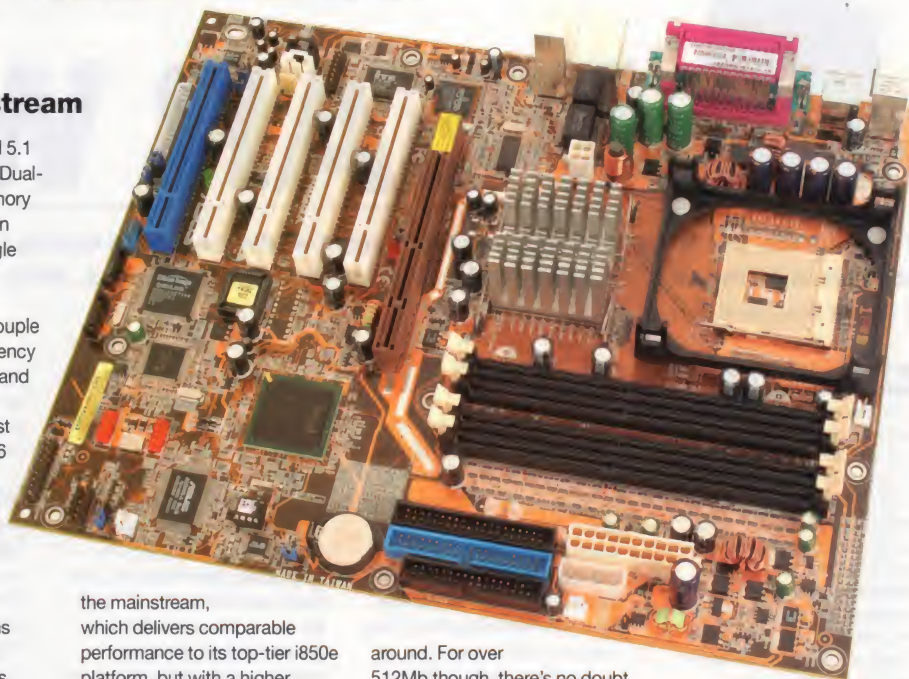
LAN, AGP8x, Firewire and 5.1 audio via SP/DIF. Being a Dual-Channel DDR board, memory can be installed singly or in identical pairs. With a single DIMM, performance is no different than the likes of i845PE, but crack out a couple of sticks of quality low-latency memory of the same size and the story is quite different.

Pitting the board against the P4T-533C with PC1066 memories – both were equipped with a 3.06GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM and a reference Radeon 9700 Pro – and throughout the gaming benchmarks both platforms were within 2 to 3 per cent of each other. The numbers aren't particularly important. What is though, is that for the first time, DDR is able to perform on a par with the more expensive RAMBUS.

This means that finally Intel has provided a P4 offering for

the mainstream, which delivers comparable performance to its top-tier i850e platform, but with a higher premium for the motherboard itself. If you're only going to stick 512Mb or less in your system and you're not worried about overclocking, the RAMBUS could almost end up more cost effective if you shop

around. For over 512Mb though, there's no doubt that Granite Bay is the daddy. Add the relative ease with which you can overclock a DDR rig, and you can't go wrong with this killer motherboard, that provides unrivalled performance and the best feature set we've seen.



PCZONE
VERDICT

91

In a word – awesome

MAYA II RADEON 9700 PRO

GRAPHICS CARD

■ Manufacturer: Gigabyte | Price: £288 |
Phone: 01908 362 700 | uk.giga-byte.com

An ATI card that's far from cool

WE'RE going to be buried in an avalanche of GeForce FX cards over the next couple of months so we thought it fair to sneak in another ATI card first, lest we get accused of favouring NVIDIA by ATI's loyal followers.

Unlike cards such as the Sapphire, Gigabyte is offering a pretty large bundle of software with its board, which includes six

games (*Serious Sam*, *Rune*, *Motocross Mania*, *Oni*, *Heavy Metal FAKK 2* and *4x4 Evo*) and *PowerDVD XP 4*.

We can't understand what the thinking is here. We'd prefer a seriously graphics-intensive game to show off the new card to the max rather than a bunch of old and, in some cases, second-rate offerings. At least *Serious*

Sam enables you to see what you're paying your money for, but it's no *Unreal 2*.

Cable-wise you get the standard DVI-VGA dongle and a non-standard S-video and composite out lead – the S-video-style port on the card is non-standard and needs the bespoke cable to hook up a TV or other display. Once done, the board can be driven directly from the TV or split between TV and monitor via Hydravision.

Most of ATI's partners are still using the same reference design, and the Maya II is no exception – at stock speeds its scores are identical to those of the reference and Sapphire cards, the only real difference

being the cooling. In this case a large gold fansink and gold ramsinks – both made of aluminium – are fitted to the front of the board. It's clear that Gigabyte feel the memory cooling to be purely cosmetic as they've totally omitted to fit any to the rear of the board, which means the BGA modules of DDR on the rear will overheat and cause corruption as it would normally when the card is pushed too much beyond spec.

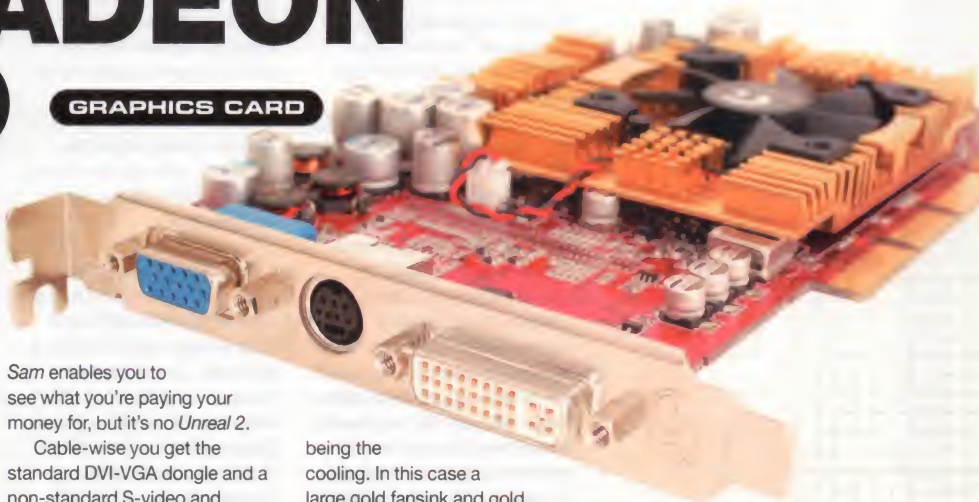
Overall the Maya II looks like a bad buy. The bundle of games is poor (most of you would

probably prefer a price reduction) and the memory cooling feels like a half-hearted effort. There's little point cooling half the memory as you can't overclock half the card's RAM. It might look flash but ultimately it won't deliver any more than the next relatively uninspiring board.

PCZONE
VERDICT

79

Mediocre at best





DEAR WANDY

This month, our hardware surgeon answers a few common hardware questions, cusses at Windows ME, and confesses his love for Bill Gates. Well, sort of...

■ HOUSE DOCTOR Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing. **Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE**, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. **Email** Address your letters to us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

THE STUFF OF LEGEND

Q About a month ago, my family decided to replace our veteran PII 233 PC with a slightly more powerful machine. After a little discussion with the salesman in PC World ("Well, that model is kind of OK, but it'll be out of date in three minutes. What you need is this baby here, a snip at only £2,000 more..."), we decided on a P4 2.5GHz Legend computer. The specs are fine and everything is working, but I want to get a new graphics card as it came with a GeForce4 MX440. I was wondering whether a GeForce4 Ti4200 card would last very long considering the pace of modern games? Also, do you know of any manuals or other books that would help me with a bit more advanced knowledge of computer hardware and installation. Any advice would be gratefully received.

Gareth Evans

A What you do boils down to how much you can afford, and how much of a hurry you're in. It may sound silly, but while the GeForce4 Ti4200 is a great card, it's actually quite a weakling compared to its bigger brother, the Ti4600, and nothing compared to some of the technology you'll be seeing early next year. Our hardware man, Steve Spence, flew out to Comdex and was stunned by some of the technology he saw. His advice would echo mine, which is to wait. Wait until after Christmas, when hopefully you'll be a little more flush with cash, then you can either hit the sales or go after one of the next generation cards in the spring. The machine you have is really quite spunky and unless you have a burning desire to max out every detail setting in every game at top resolution, there's no point in whipping the lid off and tinkering

around. With regard to books on building your own PC, there's plenty of choice. If you want to dip your toe in the paddling pool rather than dive in at the deep end, have a look at *Building A PC For Dummies* (ISBN 0764507826) and at *Upgrading And Fixing PCs For Dummies* (ISBN 0764507192). Be aware that a lot of books are out of date, so when browsing look at the date they were printed. *The Step-By-Step Guide To Upgrading And Repairing A PC* (ISBN 1859608884) hit the shelves only recently and seems a fairly comprehensive guide.

BLOCK WARS

Q I have major graphics card problem. I recently bought a PNY Verto Geforce4 Ti4200 card. When playing most new games I find red, blue and green shaded blocks flashing in different parts of the screen. I've updated the drivers on the card and the games but with no luck. I have not tampered with the card or over-clocked it.

Fat Tony

A Sounds like you have a duff video card. I had a similar problem with a GTI Club arcade cabinet about a year ago. On startup the machine was fine, but after entering the game you'd see flicking blocks – sometimes in random bright colours, sometimes just weird and pixelated. It got worse over time and, after a little investigation, it turned out the graphics chip was on the fritz. Once the board was sent away for repair the problem disappeared. You may want to just check that the card is seated properly inside your machine, but my guess is that if it is, it's just a Friday afternoon one. So the next step is simply to take the Verto card back to wherever you bought it and score yourself a

replacement. If you've saved up any cash in the meantime, see if you can't haggle the cost to swap up to a Ti4600.

MORE THAN A TON

Q I've upgraded my PC, but it lacks the final punch, both in processor speed and FSB speed. When I remove the FSB-speed jumper on my MSI K7T Turbo mainboard in order to change FSB to 133 MHz (I've bought an AMD Athlon 1.33GHz instead of my old Duron 800), my PC initially works for several sessions, but suddenly it freezes and won't even reboot unless I replace the jumper. I've flashed to the latest BIOS. My RAM is bought as 133MHz in two different blocks. I run Window 98 on 256Mb RAM. Now, I know now that the FSB jumper should have been set to 133MHz even with my old Duron, but it was my first DIY computer. By the way, that particular MSI mainboard originally had a fault in the manual regarding the position of the BIOS jumper – can it destroy something, trying to boot the PC with the BIOS jumper in 'clear' position?

Mikael le Dous

A I'd be staggered if you'd irreparably damaged your motherboard from the wrong jumper settings, unless you were mucking about with voltages. Note that some AMD boards can, for whatever reason, be extremely picky about the RAM they have on them, so my first suggestion would be to swap out the sticks you have, one by one, and then fire your PC up to see if anything's changed. Ideally what you want is a single stick from a known and trusted manufacturer. You may also be experiencing the age old bugbear of not enough power from your PSU, or not enough cooling on your new processor. The particular chip you've chosen is known for getting hot, and you can't

be liberal enough with the heat compound and the size of the fan.

HARD DISK THIEF

Q I currently have a problem within Windows ME in that its System Restore feature is pinching all my hard disk space. I currently have a 25Gb disk, which is partitioned into four drives, and my C: drive is currently set at 3Gb. However, more than 2Gb of this space is taken by the hidden '_RESTORE' folder which I cannot delete. I have adjusted the slider to 'minimum' in the system settings within the Control Panel. I have even



Microsoft advise that you never disable System Restore, but you can always lessen its impact on your drive space.

selected the Disable System Restore option within the advanced settings on the Performance tab, but all to no effect. And as I use my machine mainly for games, I am constantly installing/deleting games and this is slowly but surely increasing the size of the folder on my C: drive. My question is therefore simple, how do I disable this function so that I can reclaim this large space?

Kev

A The first thing I'd do is check you have the System Restore patch from Microsoft's site. This fixed a few anomalies in the way that the feature worked, and you may find it cures your problem. Otherwise the only other option open to you is to remove the folder manually, like you've tried to do, only

"When playing most new games I find red, blue and green shaded blocks flashing in different parts of the screen"

"I was told a new mouse would be sent at no cost. All I'd have to do is walk to the nearest postbox and drop off the expired rodent"

outside of Windows. Boot to DOS using a floppy (if you have no such disk, visit www.bootdisk.com) and then delete it that way. ME will probably recreate the folder when you go back into Windows, but this time it's more likely it'll stick to the restrictions you imposed upon it in the Control Panel.

DEAD MOUSE 2

Q A quick one regarding your letter from Benjamin Welby and his Microsoft Optical mouse. I own one of the same and the left-click button ceased working. Although I'd lost the receipt and was resigned to buying a new one, I thought I'd try Microsoft. I called the phone number on the support page and after one ring the phone was answered by a very helpful lady who took my details and passed me to the correct department. I explained the problem and was told a new mouse would be sent out, at no cost. All I'd have to do is walk to the nearest postbox and drop off the expired rodent in a freepost envelope. So a very large pat on the back to Bill and his minions – congrats on excellent customer service!

Matt Skelton

This man will fix your mouse.



A To be honest, you only have to look at the Microsoft website to see just how seriously they take their support, both for customers and developers. Look in the newsgroups and there are always a large number of very helpful people with Microsoft e-mail addresses tackling the most bizarre problems from irate users. While I'm no fan of Microsoft's Office suite – I think it has become bloated with a whole raft of unnecessary features – and I've had simply awful experiences with Windows 95, Windows 98 and Windows ME, I don't ever recall having questioned their desire to help out and win over their customers. And their hardware products, bar a few dodgy mice, are second to none.

ALL IN THE MATHS

Q I have a plain vanilla AMD 1.33GHz CPU, MSI K7T266 Pro motherboard with 256Mb of DDR RAM, a Seagate 30Gb hard drive along with a PNY Verto 64MB GeForce4 Ti4200 graphics card. I have recently upgraded my video card from a Hercules Kryo II 64Mb Prophet 4500 to the all-singing, all-dancing GeForce. However, I'm wondering if there's any way to make it faster? In games like *Unreal Tournament 2003*, my computer appears to struggle – even when a single enemy is on screen. It stops and it starts with the most impressive slide show in history, even on 1024 x 768 resolution. Is it true that BIOS settings can affect the card's performance?

And if so, can you suggest how these should be set in order to get the most out of my new card. Please help, as I splashed out for this card purely for *UT2003*.

Scott Abbott

A *Unreal Tournament 2003* is a milestone game, not only for the way it looks and plays but also the way it raises the minimum specifications for hardware. It pretty much destroyed my P4 1.5GHz GeForce3, and how the developers can get away with suggesting a 1.0GHz chip will render it as intended is anyone's guess. So a short answer for you is that you need more oomph. Your processor only just meets the requirements on the back of the box, and if you're going to play the game properly then you need at least 2.0GHz – a Ti4200 on its own will not paddle you out of the creek. Also, let's stop to think about resolutions here. While your desktop may be 1600 x 1200, or perhaps 1280 x 1024, games running at similar sizes have an awful lot more work to do. Look at it mathematically: 640 x 480 = 307,200 pixels on your screen. 1024 x 768 = 786,432 pixels, more than double. 1600 x 1200 = 1,920,000 pixels, more than six times. And almost 2 million pixels! You wouldn't be able to count them all in a lifetime, yet you ask your card to shuffle every one of them about 25 or more times a second. Thus an even shorter answer to your problem would be to reduce the pixel count and drop a few detail settings, because I think you're demanding too much from the old girl. Then you should be able to get a decent game in.

Visit Wendy at www.dearwendy.com



For this kind of detail, you need serious, serious hardware...

ALCATEL SHUTDOWN

I have an Alcatel modem – you know, the nice blue Manta Ray thing – on my BT Broadband connection and it worked just fine until I tried to install a Gigabyte motherboard running the VIA chip set. After approximately five minutes, the PC shut down for no apparent reason. After a couple of hours trying to figure out what was going on, my friend tracked the fault to the modem. One quick call to the very helpful people on the BT Helpline and the problem was identified. It seems that the Alcatel requires 550mA to run, but the VIA chipset will only allow 500mA from each USB port – and will shut down if you exceed this amount. So a quick trip back to the computer shop, a bit of explaining later, and hey presto! My system now runs fine with its new Lex motherboard with SiS chipset. The shop owner even went to the effort of marking the rest of his VIA boards to this effect!

Pete

Wandy says: With an increasing number of people buying into broadband, issues like the one you describe are going to become common place. And of course, if you have other hardware hanging off USB ports, such as a scanner or even a mobile phone charger, then you're going to be sucking more and more power. Some of the larger, more expensive scanners can draw 750mA, meaning together with an Alcatel modem you're talking more than 1,000mA – and for that you need a powered USB hub. To see what devices draw what current, right-click on My Computer and select Properties from the pop-up menu. In Windows 95/98/ME click the Device Manager Tab. In Windows 2000 and XP, click Hardware and then open the Device Manager from there. Open the Universal Serial Bus Controllers branch, and double click the USB Root Hub node. Click the Power tab and you'll be able to see what's being drawn down the lines.

Hungry little fella, this one...



WIN £50



WATCHDOG

**"Err... hello? Could we have some service please? Excuse me!"
Oh sod it, over to PC ZONE...**

■ **WRITING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you have a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and contact number. With PCs, make sure that you also include all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

"And they have the gall to ask me to pay for the postage to send it back, which will cost £7.95 plus VAT"

MATT DYER ON HAVING TO SEND HIS DEAD MOTHERBOARD BACK TO DABS

GIFT-WRAPPED?

£89 may not be much money to someone like, say, Eddie Irvine, Richard Branson or even Clare Sweeney – the one who used to be in *Brookie* and who earned £2.5 million last year for... er... doing bra ads? But for the rest of us, it's something of an investment.

Reader Duane Kingdon spent exactly that sum on a new motherboard from Time Computers: "The item arrived, I opened the box and inside there was a plastic-type bag folded in half with one piece of sticky tape there to hold the excess down," explains the somewhat gob-smacked Duane. "Because the bag was transparent, I could see that the motherboard was not the one I was expecting either."

Of course our Duane phoned Time immediately, and the conclusion was that the motherboard was intended for an older Time PC he owned: "I presumed this would be sorted by me returning the board, until the woman on the phone asked if the 'sealed' bag had been opened," recalls Duane. "I then told her that there was no seal on the bag and that it was open if you were to remove the sticky tape."

In a staggering outbreak of 'jobsworth-ness', the woman on the phone told Duane because it wasn't sealed it couldn't be returned or refunded. "I didn't open it! I am not a liar," fumes Duane. Look, we believe you!

Over to Time: "The information we were given with the initial



Time Computers announce new tamper-proof packaging.

order was incorrect, which is why Duane was sent the wrong motherboard," offers a spokesperson for the box shifter. "We'd like to apologise to Duane for the confusion in returning the item and he will now be sent the correct motherboard plus a refund of £7 for the difference in price."

Any explanation though for the piss-poor packaging? Or how about the "woman on the phone" and her attitude? Nope, sorry Duane, she's probably been promoted...

LOST IN THE JUNGLE.COM

You order. You wait. Then they cancel. That's what happened to Ken Saiger who ordered a Philips monitor for £99 from Jungle.com. Their reason? They realised that they no longer stocked the item.

Fair enough, but Ken wasn't happy with their offer of a comparable item – it would cost £117. "When I pointed out the price difference, the salesman said, 'That's the price – take it or leave it,'" says Ken. "I explained the situation and he went on to say Jungle were reducing their stock from 8,000 items to 2,000 and would be taken over by Argos after Christmas."

He then gave Ken two website addresses for competitor companies who could fulfil his order: "Please let your readers know the present state of Jungle.com and the dangers of placing orders with them," warns Ken.

Jungle of course apologise for any inconvenience caused but say they "did everything possible to resolve the issue with him. After determining that we could no longer supply the product, we tried to find him a suitable alternative and when that was rejected, we even suggested several of our competitors who carry the same product."

As for your warning about their up-and-coming takeover by Argos, Jungle put a positive spin on the situation: "We are in the process of rationalising



Richard E Grant – not for sale from Jungle despite impending takeover by Argos. Sorry, ladies...

(that's cutting – Ed) our range of goods prior to our closer integration into the Argos Group and this obviously impacts on our offerings to customers," they reckon. "We continue to give our customers the very best service possible and that service will remain our priority."

READ THE SMALL PRINT!

It started with a motherboard. Cheap as chips, it was bought by Matt Dyer from Dabs. It worked for several weeks and then it suddenly died. Matt was told he would have to send in the card for repair and not a replacement: "Not only this but it would take four-six weeks to fix, so you can imagine my frustration. And they have the gall to ask me to pay for the postage to send it back, which will cost £7.95 plus VAT."

Ouch. So is Dabs really doing anything wrong? We asked Louis Derbyshire, their ever helpful communications manager. "Mr Dyer reported the problem with the motherboard on November 4, which is seven weeks after he took delivery on September 16," comes back the efficient response. "Had the fault been reported within 28 days of receipt, we could have offered a full refund or replacement."

Because the 28 days had expired, they offered a warranty repair. This is in line with their returns and procedure policies which can be found on their site. The

moral here? Read before you spend. Repeat that to yourself ten times and then go have a lie down.

E-BUGGERED

Printing a letter of complaint about a company can sometimes open the floodgates. And this is certainly true of our 'good friends' at E-Buyer who continue to clog up the Watchdog mailbag with letters from people such as Dylan Grant: "I decided to upgrade my motherboard to one costing £100.57," explains Dylan. "I received my order, only to find they'd sent a cheaper version, which costs £70."

Of course, this lesser model was an insult in itself but then Dylan found it had no driver CD, no USB/game adapter and it was a 'used' item – "or does it collect dust in the anti-static bag?" ponders Dylan. "I think not, and the AGP slot was used as the yellow sticker was broken due to a card placement."

This isn't the first time E-Buyer has sent him a used motherboard masquerading as new one. Dylan reckons this is pathetic service and believes it's time trading standards took a good look at them.



Could this be E-Buyer's new product depot...

He could have a point but what do E-Buyer have to say for themselves? "In this instance, these two Asus motherboards were incorrectly located in our warehouse – this meant Mr Grant was sent the wrong board on more than one occasion," says the e-tailer. "We have now rectified this error and these products will ship correctly in the future."

They say that they do not knowingly pass off used

THE ACCUSED

dabs.com

PHILIPS

TIME

ebuyer

jungle

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

crucial
TECHNOLOGY

▲ EVEN A BLIND SQUIRREL FINDS AN ACORN EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE...

Ah, just the way we like 'em – short and sweet: "After reading many complaints, I feel credit is due where deserved" says reader 'Martin'. "I ordered 256Mb of RAM from Crucial yesterday at 12:30. It was at my doorstep at 09:30am this sunny morning in sleepy Belfast – cheaper by far than my local component emporium."

Martin says he now has a faster machine and would like all you fellow readers to know just how impressed he is with Crucial.

Fair enough.

crucial
TECHNOLOGY

The Memory Experts™

Crucial Technology – feckin' fast...

products as new and regret that the boards had signs of previous use: "I've requested the person responsible for buying in these boards to get onto the suppliers about this immediately," finishes E-Buyer. "Please pass on my apologies to Mr Grant for the annoyance and disappointment caused."

If any other readers have found themselves in a similar situation to Dylan, let us know.

BARGAIN HUNTER

When's a bargain not a bargain? When you can't use the item you bought as it doesn't come with everything you need to get it working. It's a fact Christopher Burns found out to his cost.

He bought a Philips soundcard from PC World for £30 – not bad considering they usually cost 70 smackers. Too good to be true, eh? Err... quite: "When I got home and had the chance to examine it, I found the card wasn't bundled with either the Line-out or S/P-DIF cables needed to connect it to a speaker set," explains Chris. "I went back to PC World and looked for the cables – I wasn't hopeful as they appeared to be the sort of proprietary thing only Philips might supply."

Chris was right, so he phoned the spods at Philips who said they'd send through the cables at no extra charge. Three months later, and Chris hasn't received anything, despite reassurance the situation would be resolved.

Watchdog contacted Philips to find out if they could magic up the leads from somewhere. They apologise and say: "due to the inconvenience Mr Burns has been caused, I have contacted Philips Sound in Vienna who will courier a cable to Mr Burns direct," says a spokesperson. "I hope this goes some way to restoring Mr Burns' faith in our company."

ADSL BOTCH-UP

ADSL. The future? Yep, which is why companies sensing cash are leaping into it – and that includes ET Global Solutions. Reader Dave Hopper splashed out £184 for a modem, a connection fee and two month's line rental.

After three weeks, he had received nothing. A call finally got him through to an operator who offered a compensation deal and a promise that he'd be connected shortly: "I've received a modem and software but no connection details and I've spent hours ringing and not being answered," says Dave. "Any help would be appreciated, as £184 isn't something I care to write off."

We've got bad news.

According to our sources, ET Global Solutions has 'ceased trading'. There are several lines you can pursue. One is that Gio Internet, who handled the billing relationship for ETGS, are taking over the defunct company's customer base. Punters who've coughed up can hook up on Gio's ADSL at a special rate instead or go with another provider. Call Gio on 0870 922 4000 or e-mail support@giointernet.com.

Alternatively, you can contact ETGS's liquidators at: R W Keating Ltd, 20 Winmarleigh Street, Warrington WA1 1JY. If you paid by credit card, drop your card issuer a line as well and fill them in on the situation. They should be able to help. Let us know how it goes, Dave... [E]



From Philips (Vienna branch), with love...

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BUYER'S GUIDE

We've performed massive surgery on our Buyer's Guide to give you an even clearer picture of what makes up the dream games machine. We've got three categories for each component, giving you the Best Performer, the Best Buy and the Best Budget. If you think we've got something wrong, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk, and if we print your suggestion we'll give you a GeForce 4 card from Gainward

BEST PERFORMANCE

BEST BUY

BEST BUDGET

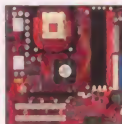
INTEL MOTHERBOARD



P4T-533C
STREET PRICE £129.95
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

Following the success of its Intel-850-based P4T, ASUS release a revision based on the i850e chipset for the new 533MHz FSB Pentium 4s. With support for PC1066 RAMBUS and AGP4x, the P4T-533 manages to stand head and shoulders above the competition thanks to clever board design and high-quality components. If you have to have the best then you have to have this.

WAS £136
NOW £130



845E MAX2-BLR
STREET PRICE £117.50
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

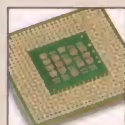
The Max2-BLR from MSI is one of the most rounded Intel 845E packages we've seen. Based on the newest revision of the DDR-supporting chipset for the latest 533MHz FSB chips, MSI has brought in some clever extras including onboard 5.1 sound. The addition of Bluetooth allows wireless connectivity to enabled gadgets, plus readiness for a range of peripherals.



GA-8IEX
STREET PRICE £91.64
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Just because you're working to a tight budget, don't think you have to settle for second best. If you're after an entry-level Pentium 4 then you could do worse than check out the excellent GA-8IEX from Gigabyte. Along with support for the new 500MHz FSB chips and DDR memories comes integrated Creative 5.1 sound and 10/100 network plus six USB2.0. For less than £100 you can't do better.

INTEL PROCESSOR



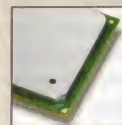
PENTIUM 4 3.06GHZ (WITH HYPERTHREADING)
STREET PRICE £574.57
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

As the first CPU to break the 3GHz barrier we knew this 3066MHz chip from Intel was going to be fast. Incorporating a new technology known as 'Hyperthreading' these new CPUs are capable of running like a dual-processor set-up, taking multitasking performance and responsiveness to whole new levels.



PENTIUM 4 'A' 2GHZ
STREET PRICE £153.92
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

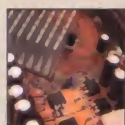
Pentium 4 'A' (or the 'Northwood' core as it is known) has doubled the cache of the previous-generation chips. Based on a 400MHz bus, the 2GHz chip is compatible with any of the i845e/i850e motherboards and would be more than respectable in any gaming system. Look at the price difference between this and the top-end Intel chip on the left. Frightening isn't it?



CELERON 1.8GHZ
STREET PRICE £65
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

With a quarter the cache of the newest Pentium 4s, the Celeron 1800MHz may not seem like it has the necessary guts for a decent gaming system but nothing could be further from the truth. At entry level these chips are a cost-effective way of getting an i845e/i850e system together, which can be upgraded to P4 later simply by swapping chips. It's a brilliant compromise solution.

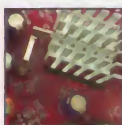
AMD MOTHERBOARD



ASUS A7N8X
STREET PRICE £126
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

It's been a long time coming but everything good is worth the wait and finally we've got our hands on the nForce 2 in the form of the A7N8X from ASUS. Bringing everything NVIDIA have promised including DualDDR DDR400, AGP8X, dual LAN, Firewire, USB2.0 and other added goodies such as Serial-ATA, this new board sits numero uno thanks to an excellent feature set and blistering performance.

WAS £128
NOW £126



K7N420PRO
STREET PRICE £83.42
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

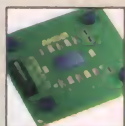
As the top nForce board, the K7N420Pro from MSI beat every KT266/266A offering we put it against. Add to the great performance an integrated GeForce2MX graphics chip plus separate AGP 4x slot, 100Mbit LAN, integrated 5.1 sound, and you'll agree it's perfect for seasoned enthusiasts and first-time gamers alike. Watch out for the nForce 2 boards, arriving next month though.



GA-7TXH
STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362 700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Usurps another great Gigabyte board – this one is a fantastic Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative, which is plenty good enough for gamers. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR266 boards for Athlon. A complete bargain if you're looking to build a cheap system around an AMD processor.

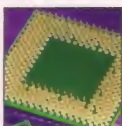
AMD PROCESSOR



ATHLONXP 2700+
STREET PRICE £288
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

While they may not come top of the pile for sheer number crunching with the AthlonXP just yet, AMD is making some substantial steps in that direction – as the new 2700+ CPU proves. Based on a ramped-up 166MHz front-side bus, these new CPUs are more than 10 per cent quicker at the same frequencies. It may lack the fancy Hyperthreading of the new Pentium 4 but then it costs about half as much.

WAS £296
NOW £288



ATHLONXP 2100+
STREET PRICE £87
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Running at 1.8GHz, the 2100+ AthlonXP is the quickest of AMD's original AthlonXP chips. Boasting both Quantispeed and 3DNow! Architectures plus fast cache and a 266MHz bus speed, most existing Athlon motherboards will support it out of the box. In terms of bang for your buck this provides the best middle-ground solution for gaming that money can buy.

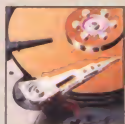
WAS £90
NOW £81



ATHLONXP 1800+
STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Low-end Pentium 4s and AthlonXP's are now getting so cheap they rival the Durons and Celerons of this world – and that's exactly what we have here. AMD has traditionally been the cheaper of the two processor giants, and the AthlonXP 1800+ (top-end equipment not so long ago), has taken such a plunge in price it's within £5 of the old Best Budget chip, the Duron 1.3GHz. Bargain.

HARD DRIVE



WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £147
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

With your game and media collections growing every day – some game installs use more than 2Gb of your precious storage – what you need is a really big, fast hard drive and that's exactly what Western Digital deliver with the WD1200JB. 8Mb of cache and spin speeds of 7200RPM mean that this 120Gb beast thrashes all competition beating

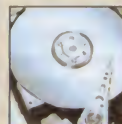
WAS £157
NOW £147



BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB
STREET PRICE £76
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

An old favourite at PC ZONE, the Barracuda ATA IV is packed full of clever technology, which allows this 60Gb beastie to spin at the heady heights of 7,200RPM while sounding much less obtrusive than many 5,400RPM units. Don't underestimate the difference this can make. If you're still struggling with space this could well be worth a dip.

WAS £79
NOW £76



U SERIES 6 40GB
STREET PRICE £63
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, and find themselves replaced in the hallowed PC ZONE Buyer's Guide pages by its younger brother the Series 6. With the same specs as the Series 5 these new drives run even quieter and cooler than before, and provide what must be considered the minimum amount of storage space for any self-respecting gaming system.

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www.gainward.net



IS YOURS A GOLDEN SAMPLE?

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BEST PERFORMANCE	BEST BUY	BEST BUDGET
 <p>PX-W4012TA STREET PRICE £78 MANUFACTURER Plexor TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522 WEBSITE www.plexor.be</p> <p>A decent CD-rewriter provides a flexible storage solution, and most of the problems associated with the technology have been eradicated with this drive. If CD burning times of more than five minutes won't do look no further than the PX-W4012TA from Plexor. Cutting CDs in around two minutes this 40x leviathan has a full range of countermeasures including Burn-Proof to make coasters a thing of the past.</p>	 <p>CRW3200E-VK STREET PRICE £86.94 MANUFACTURER Yamaha TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.yamaha-europe.com</p> <p>It might not be as fast as the Plexor drive but this is still a superb buy. Yamaha has consistently been praised for making great long-lasting CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the companies' current range-topper. The overall bundle is excellent but we particularly love its Audiomaster burning mode for cutting high-quality audio CDs – and we're sure you will too. A veritable bargain if ever we saw one.</p>	 <p>40X12X48 CDRW STREET PRICE £45.82 MANUFACTURER LiteOn TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.liteonit.com</p> <p>The LiteOn 40x12x48 offers stunning value for money, costing slightly more than many standard CD-ROM drives. While maybe not as feature-packed as the Plexor and Yamaha it does have a few tricks up its sleeve, including Smart-Burn – a technology which assesses media quality and adjusts burn speeds to reduce coaster ratio. The best low-cost drive that money can buy.</p>
 <p>SAPPHIRE ATLANTIS RADEON 9700 STREET PRICE £265 MANUFACTURER Sapphire TELEPHONE 020 8879 6047 WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com</p> <p>We thought it would be months before we'd see boards based on the Radeon 9700 Pro dipping below £300, but Sapphire obviously had other ideas. Delivering the same high framerates as the Hercules card previously listed the Sapphire is around £60 cheaper missing only the cosmetic</p>	 <p>VERTO TI4200 64MB STREET PRICE £106 MANUFACTURER PNY TELEPHONE 01256 338 609 WEBSITE www.pny-europe.com/uk</p> <p>The Verto Ti4200 64MB GeForce4 from PNY is a relatively late arrival. Coming within 20 per cent of Ti4600 in many benchmarks, but costing up to half the price, it has all of the features of the quicker GPU without the associated dent in your wallet. Overall, we think this is the best solution if you're looking to future-proof your system without spending a</p>	 <p>EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO STREET PRICE £83 MANUFACTURER HiTech TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk</p> <p>The Excaltibur Radeon 9000 Pro may not be the fastest DirectX8.1 board but it's certainly the cheapest. Coming in at well under the price of the equivalent Hercules board, it sports ATI's new mainstream GPU and 64Mb of 275Mhz DDR (500Mhz). This HiTech board is a great step-up to playing shader-dominated games for the budget-conscious.</p>
 <p>SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLATINUM/EX STREET PRICE £162 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com</p> <p>Successor to the Sound Blaster Live! series, the newer Sound Blaster Audigy brings with it a pile of new toys including EAX advanced HD and on-board Firewire. The Platinum/EX card comes with an external breakout box which moves all the important ports and connectors of the Platinum onto your desk.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY2 STREET PRICE £88 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com</p> <p>The original Sound Blaster Audigy sat in this slot from the day it arrived, only to be replaced by its next of kin, Audigy2. Delivering further improved audio quality, though this time over 6.1 channels of Dolby Digital EX, Audigy2 is the first soundcard to receive THX certification and deliver the fidelity required to reproduce new formats such as DVD-Audio. Pound-for-pound it's the best gaming soundcard in the world.</p>	 <p>GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DIGITAL EDITION STREET PRICE £37.50 MANUFACTURER Hercules TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com</p> <p>As a frequent offender on the PC ZONE Buyer's Guide, the Fortissimo II lived in the Best Bargain slot for many months – only to be replaced by its doppelgänger the Fortissimo II Digital Edition – which adds 5.1 for your DVDs and an even better software bundle.</p>
 <p>INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER V3.0 STREET PRICE £37 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>Probably the cheapest upgrade you can perform, but if you're playing with a rubbish mouse it could give you the biggest performance increases. Hardcore gamers love the IntelliMouse Explorer v3.0, and we have to agree that it's the best ball-less rodent out there. With improved optical sensors, a better shape and even more responsive buttons it's in a word – fragtastic.</p>	 <p>MX500 STREET PRICE £32 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com</p> <p>Microsoft might dominate the mouse market but it hasn't got everything its own way. The MX500 is one of the most interesting mice we've seen for a while now. The left and right buttons are hidden – being integrated into the upper shell of the body and on top of the fourth and fifth buttons. There are two either side of the wheel to assist scrolling, plus one that emulates Alt-Tab. Very handy.</p>	 <p>OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE STREET PRICE £25.84 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>For gamers who don't need five buttons and a portable back-scratcher on their mice, we present the Optical Mouse Blue. With all of the high-tech optical wizardry of the other Microsoft mice, this funky blue three-buttoned offering is extremely comfortable to use and is perfect for RPG/RTS titles – or FPS-ers who prefer to keep most of their controls on the keyboard.</p>
 <p>PRO KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £52.87 MANUFACTURER Apple TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010 WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk</p> <p>While it may seem odd to have a Mac product amongst all this PC goodness we have good reason. Rather than faff around with 15 multifunction buttons which don't help at all in fast-paced gaming, the Pro Keyboard from Apple is simply the best USB offering out there. Quality components make it one of the most quiet and compact offerings money can buy. You get what you pay for, remember.</p>	 <p>OFFICE KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £28.19 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>Microsoft's office keyboard may seem more focused at the professional market with the MS Office buttons across the top, but we found the scroll wheel and remappable keys brilliant in many games – in some situations acting like an additional mouse wheel, one for weapons, the other for items. Handy shortcuts abound and brilliant all-round performance make this our new Best Buy.</p>	 <p>MULTIMEDIA KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £21.14 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>The Multimedia Keyboard can only be described as the geek's friend. With support for many of the Windows XP customisations plus dedicated buttons for the instant messenger app of your choice and a central console of buttons to drive media player, life doesn't get much simpler, and, at under £25, not much cheaper either. If you're struggling with a poor keyboard give the pub a miss for one night and get this.</p>
 <p>WINGMAN CORDLESS STREET PRICE £34.07 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com</p> <p>The PC might not have a definitive gamepad just yet, but this is as close as it gets for the moment. The infra-red interface doesn't hinder your input. On the contrary, the fact it's wireless means your desktop is less cluttered and the discreet receiver is almost invisible. Comfortable to use and a doddle to set up, it makes the grade as best performance but only by a short distance.</p>	 <p>FIRESTORM DUAL-POWER GAMEPAD STREET PRICE £24.99 MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk</p> <p>This wired, force-feedback version of the Firestorm wireless might not win any awards for looks, but its ergonomics are great. Decent soft grips with superbly placed buttons and a decent d-pad make precision control a breeze. Set-up couldn't be simpler and the rumble ain't bad either. A no-nonsense pad for no-nonsense gamers.</p>	 <p>SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY STREET PRICE £12.92 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder</p> <p>Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and at under £13 really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear. We've used them in the office for years and we've never heard a word against them.</p>

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JOYSTICK

**HOTAS COUGAR**

STREET PRICE £249

MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Have we finally snapped? £249 for a joystick? You could get a brand new GeForce 4 for that and still have enough change to go out on the razz for a couple of weeks. Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, complete with tome-like manual. For those that have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane... If you're strong enough to lift it out of the box.

**SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2**

STREET PRICE £52.87

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

The Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 is a fine stick with perhaps the best, most refined force-feedback settings around. Performance is great overall, with the infra-red activation sensors in the handle. Its huge base will keep it planted on your desk and as long as you don't mind the extra wiring for the external power supply, it makes a great enhancement for any airborne frolics.

**CYBORG 3D GOLD**

STREET PRICE £30

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451 900

WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line, former Best Buy, USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both durable and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for with response and accuracy both unequalled. If you're not interested in force-feedback effects (and to be honest who is these days?) this is the stick to go for.

SPEAKERS

**MEGAWORKS 510D**

STREET PRICE £299.62

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.uk.europe.creative.com

The Megaworks 510D is the Daddy of gaming speakers – five 70W satellites and one 150W digitally amplified subwoofer together deliver 500W of power to recreate subtle sounds and devastating explosions alike. Want to know how those soldiers on Omaha Beach in *Medal Of Honour* really felt? Now's your chance. Just make sure your neighbours are away first.

**PROMEDIA 4.1**

STREET PRICE £299

MANUFACTURER Klipsch

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Klipsch's Promedia 4.1 took Best Buy many months ago with their TXH-Approval and great sound reproduction. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers to split your ears as well as the Crossfires from Videologic did. Whether you're a gamer or an audiophile looking for your PC to make sweet music, these are the business, as long as you can find an outlet willing to serve them up.

**XPS210**

STREET PRICE £40

MANUFACTURER Hercules

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

Who needs surround sound? Answer: everyone who can afford it. For everyone else, this small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set-up is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue it looks the part too...

HEADPHONES

**HD600**

STREET PRICE £200

MANUFACTURER Sennheiser

TELEPHONE 01494 551 551

WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

The HD600 are Audiophile-level headphones, and unless used with a soundcard like the Audigy Platinum/EX are total overkill for most gamers. That doesn't stop their fantastic response range from reproducing every gunshot and explosion perfectly with bass so deep and strong you'll be convinced your speakers are running too. They won't obviously – you'll have sold them to finance these.

**HD497**

STREET PRICE £47

MANUFACTURER Sennheiser

TELEPHONE 01494 551 551

WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

Replacing the HD200 Masters – which used to occupy our Best Buy slot comes the HD497 – also from Sennheiser. These new headphones have an enhanced frequency response range which might not come close to the HD600, but is still pretty damn good. Their extremely comfortable design coupled with easily replaceable parts, mean these headphones could well outlast your PC.

**GAMEVOICE USB**

STREET PRICE £34.07

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com

When are headphones more than just headphones? Simple – when they're the Microsoft Gamevoice USB. The Gamevoice allows you to talk to your mates online as you play clan games with a handy control panel which lets you switch between comms channels. Adding a new dimension to your gaming online, and doubling as a decent set of headphones they're a bit of a bargain.

TFT

**180MT**

STREET PRICE £935

MANUFACTURER Philips

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.philips.co.uk

The 180MT from Philips is more than just a flat panel. An 18in fourth-generation screen with VGA connectivity plus inputs for Scart, S-Video and an RF tuner mean that you can ditch your telly and pipe all manner of consoles, TV and video kit through the one screen. You can even use picture-in-picture to watch the latest *Futurama* while you die repeatedly in *BF1942*. Classic.

**SYNCMaster 181T**

STREET PRICE £599

MANUFACTURER Samsung

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.samsung.com

What do you need to be heralded as our Best Buy in the TFT category? You need to boast top specs, which the 181T provides with a response time of 25ms, a contrast ratio of 500:1 and rated brightness of 250 cd/m². This results in a cleaner, crisper picture than our previous award-winner. A good start but the 181T is also cheaper and bigger (a whole inch diagonally) which completes the perfect package.

**T1620B**

STREET PRICE £522.87

MANUFACTURER Sharp

TELEPHONE 0800 262 958

WEBSITE www.sharp.co.uk

Sharp's 16in T1620B is more than £100 cheaper than the iiyama and delivers all the visual goodies albeit on a smaller display area. Delivering 1280 x 1024 on a digital 75Hz, this screen will make your games look great while allowing you to reclaim some desktop real estate from large lumbering CRTs. If TFTs aren't quite affordable yet, this proves that the day isn't far away.

MONITOR

**GDM-FW900**

STREET PRICE £1,139

MANUFACTURER Sony

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.sony.co.uk

Do you remember the day when PCs used to ship with 14in screens? Pah. The gigantic 24in GDM-FW900 from Sony has to be seen to be believed. Costing almost double that of the iiyama Vision Master Pro 512, you'd expect something special and that's exactly what you get. Supporting nutty resolutions such as 2304x1440 at 80Hz, you can be sure this ultra-flat screen will deliver a rock-solid picture at all times.

**VISION MASTER PRO 512**

STREET PRICE £585.15

MANUFACTURER iiyama

TELEPHONE 01438 745 482

WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a rather smaller viewable area than suggested – 20in instead of 22in, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048x1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. There's also a four-port USB hub and integrated speakers which are OK for Windows use, but may be slightly tinny for games or music.

**720P 17-INCH CRT**

STREET PRICE £116.32

MANUFACTURER Hansol

TELEPHONE 01252 360 400

WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it does 1280x1024 at an excellent 85Hz (and for those mad enough, 1600x1200 at 75Hz). Focus is tight and the picture sharp, and considering you're paying a little over £100 there's not a lot that will touch this for the money. If you've still got a 15in monitor, consider yourself rebuked.

MP3 PLAYER

**APPLE IPOD**

STREET PRICE £388 inc VAT

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000

WEBSITE www.apple.com/ipod

With all of the styling of their desktop systems, the iPod caused a few dropped jaws for looks alone. Packing a 20Gb hard disk and speedy Firewire interface, the new models are finally Windows-compatible and come with excellent headphones and a tiny little inline remote control that means you don't have to keep fishing it out of your pocket to change tracks or up the volume.

**ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA**

STREET PRICE £330 inc VAT

MANUFACTURER Archos

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. Sound is fantastic but as with a lot of other players on the market, the bundled headphones are shite.

**MUVO**

STREET PRICE £99.99

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP without drivers, and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

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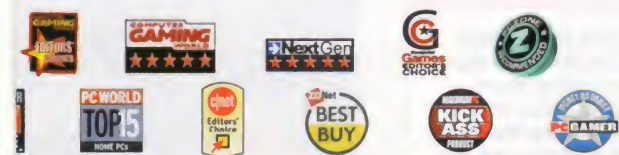
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EXTENDED PLAY

Finishing a game is only the beginning in Extended Play. Maps, mods, add-ons and extras are all here to help you get the most out of the games you play

FESTIVE FROLICKS



■ SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER

Rhianna Pratchett

▲ Although you won't get this until we've all staggered into the new year, I'm writing this in the 'hell run' leading up to the golden promise of a long and much needed Christmas break. But at the moment it seems a world away as we have just a fortnight to deliver *PC ZONE* to your good selves before we collapse into the drunken revelry of the Christmas party. This year the theme is 'popstars' and I'd like to state that rumours of *ZONE* going as *Blazin' Squad* are greatly exaggerating – my days of getting in touch with my inner 16-year-old boy are long gone. They always nick all the covers anyway.

But from where I'm sitting, this issue is shaping up very nicely. We've got some truly great demos for you including *Splinter Cell*, *Praetorians*, *Black Hawk Down* and the long awaited *Neverwinter Nights*, turn to page 116 to find out more. Wandy is guiding you through how to breathe life back into your old games on page 100 and Richie is waxing lyrical about everyone's favourite online shooter *Counter-Strike* in Games that Changed the World on page 134. All that remains for me to do is source some *Age of Mythology* maps for you, then I'm going to go and kick it with the Walthamstow massive. Just call me Rhie-P.

Gods and mortals



Brand new maps to get even more from *Age of Mythology*

■ www.microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology ■ aom.heavengames.com

BUNDLING A map editor or toolkit with a game these days is one of the smartest moves a developer can make, ensuring the longevity of their titles. Even though *Age of Mythology* is fairly new, the fact that it ships with its own in-game editor means that the fansites have been buzzing with fan-made scenarios and maps. If you're thinking of making your own then having a peep at what other people have done is the best way of learning what works and what doesn't.

First on this month's discs is a great series of single-player maps from Jetblix, who has created scenarios surrounding the adventures of Gargarensis (the Cyclops baddy from the single-player game) who has returned from the dead to get even with the Greek Arkantos. Gargarensis' quest spans six maps over several different locations, and also demonstrates how in-game cinematics can be used to enhance a storyline.

If you're more interested in creating multiplayer maps, check out the two we've got this month: *The Garden of Triangles* and *The Garden of Eden*. There's also something on the discs for those of you who want somewhere to showcase your maps in the form of the *AofM* fansite kit – download it and create your own *Mythology* shrine. If you've looked through these lot and feel you can do better, but you're just not sure where to start, then wait for our guide to creating maps in *Age of Mythology* in next month's issue.



Gargarensis has come back from the dead to taunt you once more.



Cyclops + large stick = pain.



When you're feeling blue...



Gargarensis' quest spans six maps.

CHEATS AHoy!



The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but we haven't buried it completely. Check out our cover discs where the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking. You can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under CheatStation in the Extended Play section of the discs.

This month we've got everything you need to know to cheat your way through *Iron Storm*, *Ghost Recon*, *Island Thunder*, *Red Faction*, *Hogs Of War*, *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* and *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns*. And in case you're in any doubt, just remember: those who can, do... those who can't, cheat. It's the only way.



THE GUIDE

Spruce up your old games



THE MODSQUAD

Get on your bike



DISC PAGES

Packed with exclusive demos



FIGHT CLUB

Talk about it, go on!

Waking the dead

ON THE DVD **The Neverwinter Nights community prepares for a new episodic adventure**
■ nwn.bioware.com

NEVERWINTER

Nights gave the role-playing world not only a great 3D fantasy game but also powerful level creation tools combined with a dedicated support team in the form of NWN Live. Bioware has also released many official mods, but one of the most recent has come straight from the Live team in the form of the multi-module story *The Witch's Wake*.

WW is quite different from anything else we've seen before. For a start the story takes place

outside the usual Forgotten Realms universe and rule set – you gain experience points through exploration and puzzle solving, rather than combat, and death is an every present force, especially as there's no stone of recall to get you out of danger.

All these little changes mean that *The Witch's Wake* should prove challenging to even the most harden *Neverwinter Nights* player, and the first episode *The Fields of Battle* is on our cover discs.



One change to NWN rules mean that death will be final.

"The story takes place outside the Forgotten Realms universe"



Get misty-eyed for *Spearhead*.

MoH: Spearhead

■ www.planetmedalofhonor.com

ON THE DVD **THE HYPE** might have been on *RTCW*, but it was a very different WWII epic that surprisingly stole *Half-Life*'s FPS crown this year. Playing *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* is a stunning and invigorating experience and it was only right that the expansion, *Spearhead*, should follow before gamers lost interest.

And so the inevitable tinkering follows with the latest patch updating your game to version 2.1. Unfortunately the patch only adds one German weapon rather than the exciting array of weaponry we'd hoped for in the original game, but there are plenty of tweaks to help sharpen online play and a brand new Malta map. Lock and load!



Freelancer looks pretty special.

Freelancer

■ www.microsoft.com/games/freelancer

ON THE DVD **YOU CAN BET** that when the official *Freelancer* site went live recently Mr Shoemaker was first in the queue, basking in the fact that this epic space sim (the brainchild of Chris Roberts) was even closer to release. To wet your appetite, this month we've got two movies, one from inside the cockpit and one from outside, with combat that's reminiscent of Roberts' *Wing Commander* series.

But life outside the cockpit is beautiful and detailed too – you only have to look at the selection of screenshots on the discs to see that. And if those don't get you reaching for the wallpapers and fansite kit, then you don't know what's good for you!



Explosive updates to *Battlefield 1942*.

Battlefield 1942

■ www.ea.com/eagames/official/battlefield1942

ON THE DVD **THE SINGLE-PLAYER** element of *Battlefield 1942* might have been put in at the last minute and thereby got the slamming it deserved, but the multiplayer side has been a huge success and rightly so. The first patch might have fixed a few problems, but patch 1.2 was what the community were really waiting for.

As well as containing loads of gameplay tweaks and dramatically improving single-player mode, there are also plenty of network and server fixes to help cut down lag and stop players randomly dropping off. Disappointingly, there are no official mod tools included, so we can only hope for those at a later date.

BARE NAKED LADIES



First there was *Nude Raider*, and suddenly the world, albeit the slightly sad part, wanted to see their games characters in the buff. Now even *The Sims* are available fully naked, with realistic tan lines and even er... green public hair. It's not on the discs, so if you get the urge, go use Google like everyone else.

DVD SUPREME



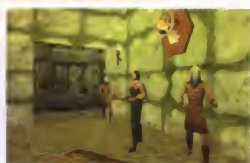
ON THE DVD We've got a great piece of software for you this month with the full 16-day trial of Nvidia's NVDVD 2.2. Just install it before you run our DVD movies and you'll soon see how much better they look. Then use the software features to capture and bookmark your favourite movie scenes or audio clips.

MAPPING POTENTIAL



ON THE DVD Continuing *NOLF2*'s pursuit to become recognised as a serious online game, Sierra have released their first official map pack for the game. There are nine deathmatch maps altogether including *Bollywood*, *Japan* and *Syberia* and you'll need update 1.2 to run the maps which is already in our essential patches this month.

EQII UNLEASHED



ON THE DVD The *EverQuest II* team and NVIDIA have got together to push the potential of the game and graphical beauty of the soon to be released GeForce FX card. This seven-minute movie gives commentary from some of the team members about aspects of the developing *EverQuest II*, but for the best stuff, skip to the last minute.

THE GUIDE: HOW TO TEACH YOU

Wanna know how to turn old nags into modern day Grand National winners? *Phil Wand* whips three famous warhorses back into shape

DOOM

YEAH, we know. Surpassed graphically by most webpages. Limited mouse support. You can't jump or crouch. Blah, blah, blah. Go back to *Doom* from the likes of *Unreal Tournament* and notice how confined it all feels. Your marine moves like he's in a neck brace. You can only look where you're facing, meaning some rooms could have Artex ceilings and 1970s lighting fixtures and you wouldn't know. Not being able to leap means you have to rely on steps, lifts and disabled ramps. It's all so passé.

LESS DOOM AND GLOOM

With new 3D hardware, the old timer can be fun again. As well as using MD2 models from the *Quake II* engine, dynamic lighting and particle effects, *jDoom*, which you can download from www.doomsday.com, lets you look around with the mouse and jump onto stuff. Go multiplayer with up to 16 combatants, both co-operative and deathmatch. Join and leave active games. And it'll run on an old Pentium.

How? Your first step is to locate id Software's IWADs from

the original game directories. These form the very heart of *Doom*, and contain all the graphics, sounds and levels wrapped up in a single package.

The shareware release of

Doom has

DOOM1.WAD.

Registered *Doom* has DOOM.WAD.

Doom II has DOOM2.WAD.

For *Final Doom* it's TNT.WAD and

PLUTONIA.WAD.

Once you've dug

them out, download

jDoom and run the

installer. You'll be asked to

locate the files you just found,

and after a short while will be

presented with something called *Doomsday Kickstart*.

Choose the flavour of *Doom*

you want, and press the Play

button. Could it be any simpler?

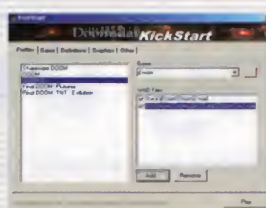
We don't think so.

TAKING IT FURTHER

Doom was the first game that turned bedroom hackers into



Superb megawad *The Underworld*, available from the.underworld.web1000.com



Adding third party IWADs into Kickstart couldn't be easier.

map makers of world renown, and you can still play their old creations using The *Doomsday Engine* (which is part of *jDoom*) – all you need is the relevant PWAD files and you're away.

The best place to look for them is on an FTP site. For

Doom levels, you can do no better than the definitive archive at 3D Gamers. Fire up your copy of Internet Explorer (any old FTP client will do) and browse to ftp://archives.3dgamers.com/pub/idgames/levels.

Our favourite PWADs include *The Darkening*, available from the megawads folder, and *Surge DM*, available in deathmatch megawads. And guess what? Those of you who have fond memories of the *Aliens Total Conversion* can use *jDoom* to render it with virtually no mucking about. See the FAQ at the *Doomsday* home page for more information.



It's all exactly as you remember. Only much, much better.

DYNAMIC DOOM

NOW WITH ADDED SPARKLE

Aside from support for 16/32-bit OpenGL and Direct3D up to 1600 x 1200 resolution, plus 3D models and dynamic lighting, *jDoom* features a huge array of graphical gimcrackery to make every *Doom* title look and play like it was released only yesterday. Depth of field makes large arenas seem more real. A particle engine means that rockets leave fizzing vapour trails – each projectile landing with a carnival of sparks that fade into puffs of smoke. The BFG charges up with a crackle and lets rip with a splodge as it always has done, but it paints every wall with a green, supernova radiance. And wow, the plasma. Duelling with one is like jet-washing a room with light and it's hard to let go of the trigger. Yes indeed, once you've played *jDoom*, you'll never go back to the cardboard cut-out originals. We guarantee it.



The *Doom Engine* adds dynamic lighting to great effect.



Plasma is beautiful and deadly. What more could you want?

OPTIONS APLENTY

JDOOM LETS YOU REVOLUTIONALISE THE WAY YOU PLAY(ED) DOOM

The real wow of *jDoom* is its options. Not only do you get a no-nonsense Windows front end, allowing you to set game resolution, sound configuration, and which WAD file you want to use, you also get countless more switches and sliders within the game itself – always run and mouselook being the most revolutionary to gameplay. For some reason the latter option is disabled by default, so be sure to track it down and turn it on. This lets you pilot your man with the keys and change where he looks with the

mouse, just like in *Quake*. There are further options associated with mouse control, including mouse sensitivity and auto-aiming similar to that of *Half-Life*. You also have a baffling range of crosshairs to choose from, new keyboard shortcuts, a drop-down console, scripting, plus a mad number of deeply complex graphical tweaks. The *Doom* HUD can also be personalised, with its various elements repositioned and turned on or off. Wow indeed.



The *jDoom* control panel, gateway to The *Doomsday Engine*.



A setting you can't ignore is mouselook. And look, crosshairs!

OLD GAMES NEW TRICKS



TOTAL ANNIHILATION

PRAISE be for *Total Annihilation*. Perennial runner up behind Westwood's *Command & Conquer*, its only real sticking point was the world's most stupid AI. At the start of every game, computer controlled units would stray into your base and shoot at you, the ensuing detonation vapourising you and half the map. Even if you did manage to escape, the match would be over shortly afterwards when you overpowered his Commander with a small plane. Flying over his base you realise he had no air defence, no nuclear capacity, and was preoccupied with producing three or four of the least powerful units. Gee, what fun.

A NEW BRAIN

It doesn't have to be this way. Although the game's intelligence routines have a number of known weak points, if you download new AI you can make your favourite RTS game challenging once more. Many of

the more potent AI packages get around any weaknesses by letting computer-controlled players cheat. Yup, cheat. They are able to build things quicker than you, and they require less metal and energy to do so. Their shots are more potent. Their buildings more hardy. They'll also build nukes and target them with pinpoint accuracy. And they use a much wider range of units.

How? Browse to www.planetannihilation.com /aicentral and open the downloads section. Here you'll find a whole page dedicated to artificial intelligence packs that don't play straight, our favourite being *Banzai v3.0*. Installation is a cinch – open up the ZIP file you downloaded and extract it to your Total Annihilation directory. Next time you fire up the game, you'll be faced with the toughest, nastiest bastards ever to appear in a real-time strategy game. They'll build Bertha cannons and Buzzsaws.

They'll construct nuclear silos and mighty Krogoths. They attack in huge groups, and won't think twice about building a massive airforce with which to thwart you.

TAKING IT FURTHER



Two TADD Gryphons give a Buzzsaw a fly-past.



The TADD Shadow Mask is a gargantuan radar jammer.

To get the best from *Banzai* and other intelligence packs like it, you'll need to acquire

yourself some new units. There are countless available but the one we've always preferred is the *TADD Super Pack* available from Merciless Creations at www.planetdungeonsiege.com/mercilesscreations.

It contains a dazzling 125 new units spread between ARM and CORE forces – every one being a worthwhile addition to the standard Cavedog line-up. Fantastic new aircraft include the stealth-cloaking atomic bomber that drop nukes, and the Dragon VTOL with its titanium armour and annoyingly deadly missiles. New land units include the massive M1A4

Campbell tank, designed to withstand assaults from Krogoths, and defensive structures range from Bertha walls – a must-have if you're up against a *Banzai* computer enemy – to Orion pop-up lasers that lunch on whole squadrons of aircraft.

TADD Super Pack also includes two new long-range missile types, Famine and Pestilence. The ARM Famine silo destroys all enemy resources, and the CORE Pestilence silo wipes out construction units, radars and radar jammers.



TOTAL ADORATION

WOW, IT FEELS LIKE A NEW GAME

The more we play *TA*, the brainchild of Chris Taylor, with *Banzai* and *TADD*, the more we love it. No other RTS game offers so much for network players, or has such a wide range of tricks and tactics. And it's over six years old! You can form alliances with other players before the game is even started. You can share your resources with allies, and even have the computer share them automatically for you. You can swap your troops and buildings between one another. Share map information. Share weapon technologies. Stack multiple commands and build orders. Have your units patrol areas of the map and head for the repair bay when they get damaged. The new *TADD* units make everything look and feel like a new game, and *Banzai* makes it play like one. Once you've got your head around the interface, *Command & Conquer* feels like a half-wit by comparison. The sequel can't arrive soon enough.



The man behind *Total Annihilation*, Chris Taylor.



The game feels as fresh today as it did six years ago.

MAPS? WE GOT MAPS!

MORE PLACES TO INVADGE AND TOTALLY ANNIHILATE

Total Annihilation has a bafflingly huge number of third-party maps available for it – you just have to know where to look and what you need. Not every map is plug and play, with many levels using non-standard tilesets and some borrowing graphics from *TA: Kingdoms*. So before you get downloading, you'll need the *Tamec 2000 HPI Addon parts A and B*. This has become the standard package for map-makers who wish to use new graphics when designing their levels, and you can find it at the utilities section of Merciless Creations (www.planetdungeonsiege.com/mercilesscreations). As for the maps themselves, the best archive we've found is *TAMEC* at www.planetannihilation.com/tamec. As well as providing you with information on each download, such as the size of the level, the number of players it supports and memory requirements, *TAMEC* also reviews each file. So far it hasn't let us down, and the maps we think work best with *Banzai* are *Threster*, *Hills N Ponds* and *Stone Geyser Canyon*.



Stone Geyser Canyon, possibly our favourite third-party map.



Thundurlok Rok is a top map for those who love to stockpile.

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC



Custom TFC models range from the spooky...



...to the ridiculous.

DESPISED by Counter-Strike players who can't muster the dexterity to play a twitch shooter, *Team Fortress Classic* was never going to win on the popularity stakes. With many TFC servers sticking to the two favoured maps, *2fort* and *well*, the number of people playing it diminishes every day, and although it still makes the top five in terms of head count, it ain't half as fun as it used to be. No, it doesn't need any more maps – most players find there are enough about already. It just needs a makeover.

CHANGING FORTS

Yes, folks, it's time to change the way TFC looks. The old girl has gained more than a few wrinkles over the years, and the arrival of younger talent makes it look even more unappealing. So open up your browser, pay a visit to www.custom-tfc.co.uk, and you'll soon feel like Laurence

Llewellyn-Bowen at a Laura Ashley Home warehouse. Here you'll find hundreds upon hundreds of new skins for every class, plus cool new weapons, new sounds, new flares for projectile weapons and background wallpaper for the drop-down console.

Before you get too excited, there are a small number of files that won't stay long on your hard drive – the female Engineer for example, while utterly superb, doesn't suit a game where the sounds that accompany her – oomph!, aagh!, medic! and so on – are exclusively male.

Anyway, we've gone for subtle changes, such as the HWGuy who has a notice saying "Feed Me!" taped to his back, a Pringles tube complete with fonk sound to replace the crowbar, and our civilian character now has an obvious bullseye painted on the front and back of his clothing – as if it

wasn't easy enough to hit the fat bastard in the first place.

TAKING IT FURTHER



"By the power of Greyskull!"



Hmm, wouldn't mind catching something nasty off her...

We've mentioned bots before, and with the recent growth in home networks they're an even more pertinent addition than

NOT FORGETTING...

TEAM FORTRESS IN GAME WHORE SHOCKER

Team Fortress is, of course, a rather old gaming franchise, and not just a free toy that turns up with official *Half-Life* updates. It originally appeared as a mod for *Quake* players who wanted to add a little structure to their gaming, gaining the loyal following of a small number of people in the process, and has since been ported to the likes of *Half-Life*, *Quake III* (www.q3f.com) and to the original release of *Unreal Tournament* (www.unrealfortress.com). With the general consensus being that *Unreal Fortress Gold* is the best incarnation yet, and with various rumours circulating that *Unreal* variants will make it to the mouth-watering surroundings of *Unreal Tournament 2003*, the *Team Fortress* concept looks as though it will live on for a few years yet.



A *Quake III* Fortress Engineer sorts out the team's defenses.



Generally reckoned to be the best *Team Fortress* variation, better even than *Team Fortress Classic*, *Unreal Fortress Gold* is very pretty and very playable.

FREE UPGRADES!

GIVE TFC A LITTLE TLC AND TURN IT INTO A NPE (NEW PLAYING EXPERIENCE)

Say, wanna make *Team Fortress Classic* play kind of different? Like, really different? Packed with fun treats such as airstrikes, grappling hooks, land mines and Apache helicopters? Sure you do. Hie thee to www.neo-tf.com and download the *NeoTF* mod, which adds all these things to your favourite team shooter plus a whole bunch of other stuff besides. Playing *NeoTF* is just like playing TFC, only you have a few more key combinations to get used to and class specific abilities. For example, the Engineer is able to

build something called a multigun, which upgrades itself depending on which team member touched it last. But it's not just defensive classes. The HWGuy has a grappling hook, which lets him scale fort walls and hose sniper balconies, and the Demoman can lay mines – in fact, every class has been upgraded. OK, so it's not the most popular mod, and UK servers are thin on the ground, but if you have ADSL or cable you should find a packed out game in the States that'll keep you entertained for hours.



Spies are able to summon rather deadly airstrikes. Sweet as.



The engineer's multigun can be upgraded by other team members touching it.

ever. For a large-scale, squad-based shooter like TFC, a game that relies heavily on big teams and a minimum of ten players, they can be a real godsend – few people have ten PCs kicking about, and fewer still would have an Internet connection wide enough to accommodate them all. So inviting virtual players along to the party can save a lot of trouble, and those crazy, 32 player blast-a-thons are no longer the stuff of dreams. Our two favourite bots for TFC come from Botman at [www.planethalflife](http://www.planethalflife.com)

.com/botman, and RedFox's superb FoxBot project from dynamic3.gamespy.com/~foxbot. The latter is perhaps the most realistic code available for the *Half-Life* engine – the way FoxBot players swap between close and long distance weapons, use grenades and exploit class advantages is truly impressive. Trying to kill an enemy who moves and shoots with computer precision is no fun, and it's the mark of a good AI programmer to code bots that are believably inaccurate. FoxBot really shines here, and five minutes after you've dropped them into your game you'll forget they ain't real... [X]



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THE MODSQUAD

Tony Lamb hits you with a montage of mods



Action Half-Life adopts the GTA: Vice City look.



See a penny, pick it up, grab your gun and run like f...

ACTION HALF-LIFE BETA 5.5

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 113Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Half-Life
ahl.telefragged.com

ACTION *Half-Life* and its fun-filled take on the film genre personified by director John Woo and films like *The Matrix* might be getting on a bit now, but its developers obviously aren't content to rest on their laurels and are continuing to improve what is already one of the best mods around. Strangely enough, *AHL*'s age probably works against it because being older it doesn't have the novelty value of some of the younger mods (and it never caught on as much as *Counter-Strike* or *TFC*), but this is unfair because it's a genuinely slick piece of work

with fantastic gameplay, excellent character and weapon skins, and some top-class maps. *AHL* also has a die-hard core of enthusiastic players, and while server numbers are sadly beginning to wane these days it's still possible to get online and stuck into a good quality game. Many long-term fans are likely to be online too, and by watching and learning you'll get to grips with *AHL*'s special features quite quickly.

These extra treats add a great deal of variety to the familiar range of FPS moves, and once you've got the hang of the rolls,

somersaults and slow-motion dodges you'll be wanting to get involved in the filming of *The Matrix II* so you can show Keanu Reeves a trick or two. Sticking on the shades, grabbing a couple of Berettas and wiping out bad guys has to be a winner in anyone's book.

If pistols aren't your thing fear not, because *AHL* comes with a cool selection of deadly ironmongery, ideally suited to encouraging the opposition to take early retirement. Rifles, submachine guns, shotguns and more add up to the deadly arsenal, each lovingly skinned

and horribly effective. Customise your selection with the laser sight, creep around the new twilight map with the night-vision goggles and stealth slippers on, and give your opponents the shock of their (soon to end) lives.

Action Half-Life is a star. It's well designed, great looking and great fun. This latest version adds yet more to an already successful formula, so install and enjoy.

PCZONE VERDICT **88**
 A classic among mods



She's a bit fierce.

THE THIRD REICH

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 106Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Unreal Tournament, patched to version 436
www.planetunreal.com/thirdreich

IT HAS been a while coming, but at last this promising *Unreal Tournament* mod has been released, and what a treat it is too. It's very much in the same style as *Day Of Defeat* for *Half-Life*, or über-shooter *Medal Of Honor*, with a choice between fighting for the Allied or Axis powers in World War II, and for a first release it's very good indeed. Not perfect to be sure – one or two graphical glitches intrude from time to time – but still very impressive, and certainly better than early versions of *DoD*. The team has

obviously made a conscious decision to release a version that will leave players wanting more. Maps in particular are impressive for a first release. They're big, well designed and believable. You can go into virtually every building, and this instantly adds a huge pile of atmosphere to the mod. Is there an enemy soldier in there? On the balcony? Preparing to shoot from a window? Tense stuff indeed. Character and weapon models are good too, and if this mod continues to progress then it could be one of the best *UT*

mods about, albeit very late in the life of the game itself. Luckily the team is looking into creating a *UT2003* version too... and that could be a real star.

PCZONE VERDICT **79**
 Very promising indeed



Best not to pick a fight with this one.



Keep on your toes – this is a fast-action mod.



Weapon skins are top class.

URBAN TERROR BETA 2.6

TOTAL
CONVERSION

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 250Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Quake III
www.urbanterror.net

OUR REALISM mods blowout in issue 109 showed *Urban Terror* to be something of a gem, with 70Mb of top-class maps, neat skins, a great selection of weapons and more in-er-face action than most mods could ever hope to see.

A year later the mod has been on a major course of steroids, and now tips the scales at a whopping 250Mb, and that's before the major map-pack additions are taken into account. Of course, some of this is simply bloat, but the vast majority

reflects new maps and features that transform *Urban Terror* into a real must-have. On a higher-spec machine with plenty of bots and detail levels set to high, this is a stunning team shooter with adrenaline levels to satisfy even the twitchiest FPS fanatic.

Quake III still isn't the best graphical medium for a realism mod – the colours just never seem to work – but the gameplay is tops and the enjoyment factor right up there with the best. If you don't fancy the ultra-realism

of *Counter-Strike* but like your action more in the hardcore vein, this is one for you.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **85**
Quake III heaven



Dark corners hide adversaries until they're right on top of you.

PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 8Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Unreal Tournament 2003
www.planetunreal.com/proleague

UT2003 mods are appearing all over the place and this latest take on the Instagib gameplay variant adds a test of reflexes even the original sometimes lacks. The premise is simple; everybody has the same weapon – in this case a machine gun – and no healthpacks, power-ups or other goodies to keep them alive. Manic fighting ensues. However, *PL* isn't quite true to the original, with a couple of tweaks added to the mix. Firstly, you have a limited amount of health and can survive more than one hit (which makes dodging a possibility, unless you get your head blown off), and

secondly you only get ten shots in one 'magazine', these slowly recharging as you go. This is enough for strafing, but saturating an area with bullets is unwise, as you're sure to be out of ammo when you need it. Stick to the old three-round-bust and you'll be fine. *PL* supplies six fairly decent new maps and works with all the existing *UT2003* maps and gameplay types too. Bot support is also good and LAN play is a blast.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **75**
 Fun in a small package

PROJECT QUANTUM LEAP

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 32Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Half-Life
www.unquenque.com/quantum

PROJECT Quantum Leap is a mapping collaboration with no less than 20 new maps by some 15 different authors bundled together into one mod. Map quality varies but overall it isn't bad (apart from a couple of lemons) and the placement of Xen aliens and grunts will occasionally catch out the unwary player. With *Half-Life* now drawing a pension, single-player mods are getting few and far between, so anything

reminiscent of the playing experience of the original game is welcome, but what does cause *PQL* a problem is the lack of a storyline. Admittedly, the team behind the mod says there's no need for one, but the absence of any sort of reason for your being there makes survival the only objective. Fair enough perhaps, but this lack of cohesion between the maps would test the patience of a saint. Instead you leap from map

to map like Sam Beckett from TV's *Quantum Leap* (hence the name) and this goes on to explain the sometimes radically different layouts. Sort of. *PQL* would be better for some judicious map culling and re-organisation. It's worth playing, but could be better.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **61**
 Needs more consistency



Far-reaching lasers can catch you in the open.

DISC PAGES

■ **WORDS** Mark Eveleigh and Rhianna Pratchett

■ **DISCS** Mark Eveleigh

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08700 711 482**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk **BEFORE YOU DIAL...** If you are calling the helpline:

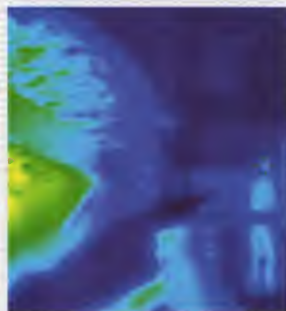
- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- You need at least a P266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on the discs. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card.
- Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only.

DISCLAIMER

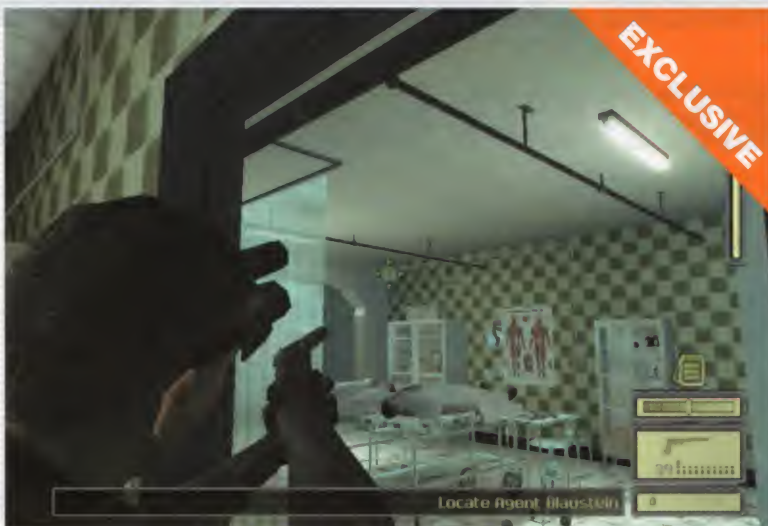
- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.



Curtains are no match for heat-sensitive goggles.

SPLINTER CELL

CD1/DVD Pub: Ubi Soft **Dev:** Ubi Soft Montreal **Reviewed:** Issue 125 (94%)



Take out the security cameras as quickly as possible.

To get this month's *Splinter Cell* demo, our intrepid disc editor was flown to Canada in a Nighthawk chopper, lowered down to the roof of a Montreal office building under the cover of darkness and equipped with the latest in spec-ops hardware. Returning to the *ZONE* offices with a severe case of groin strain, an inability to open doors without first checking under them with fibre optic cable and a fear of 'the light', his mission was a success even if he was reduced to a shivering wreck in the corner.

While the system specs are quite phenomenal (you'll need at least a 1GHz CPU and a GeForce 4 or Radeon 8500 to get it running smoothly at the lowest resolution), the wait has been worth it with the demo including the full second section from the first level of the game. What's more, from the

beginning you're equipped with both night-vision and heat-sensitive goggles together with an array of useful inventory.

You start the level in a small courtyard in the dark and will need to go down some stairs to find a doorway on your left. Never, ever enter a door straight away. Instead, equip your fibre optic cable and use it to see what's behind the door. When you've checked that the guard has moved on, open the door using the stealth option which opens the door halfway, letting you peek round the corner and hear more clearly any footsteps in the room beyond. When you're certain the guard has finished his patrol, enter the room by opening the door normally and then peg it for the shadows.

Quite aside from the frankly gorgeous visuals, sound plays a key part in detecting

and evading enemies. Whack up the volume to whatever your speakers (and neighbours) can handle and use the accelerate and decelerate controls (mouse wheel by default) to move around efficiently without alarming any guards. You can detect security cameras by the double beep sound as they scan their surroundings and can avoid most guards from hearing you by crouching and decelerating so that you are almost completely inaudible.

While you start with a plentiful supply of pistol ammo, you should avoid going in all guns blazing and to finish the mission you shouldn't need to cap anyone bar the guard in the surveillance block. By sneaking past guards or simply hiding their unconscious bodies, you'll avoid setting off any alarms and attracting unwanted attention. You can also find useful mission information by extracting data sticks from computers you find in each room, which can provide you with clues as to where security cameras are and where multiple guards are patrolling an area.

If your machine is having problems coping with the demo, there's no better excuse to check our Buyer's Guide and raid the January sales. As if you needed one.



Hide bodies to avoid setting off the alarm.

WALKTHROUGH →

YOU WON'T EVEN KNOW I'M HERE...



1 Check under the first door with the fibre optic cable to see the guard finish his patrol before entering the corridor ahead. Alternatively shoot the light out before you open the door and stay in the shadows until the guard's gone.



2 When it's clear, enter the corridor and stick to the shadows, it's time to do one of the coolest moves in the game.



3 Jump from one wall to the other in the narrow corridor and you'll be above the lighting and invisible to the guard on his return. Watch the guard walking towards your position and wait until he's directly underneath you.



4 Hit the jump button and you'll come crashing down on top of him, knocking him out. Now go and hide his body...

PRAETORIANS

CD2/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** Pyro

Rome wasn't built in a day, and thankfully neither was this demo. Although it only contains one mission, *Crossing the River Arar*, you do get the chance to play it through on both easy and normal mode, and as you only have a finite number of soldiers and loads of enemies, it's pretty challenging.

The idea is to work your way through the woodland paths, taking out enemies, (who'll often be hiding among the trees) take over an enemy village on one side of the river, repair a couple of bridges, cross the water and then bring another village to its knees. You only have one type of unit that can build and repair so look after them carefully and make sure you keep your generals out of the fray because if they die you'll lose the mission.



Stop your Roman around.



WALKTHROUGH →

CAVALRY, DRUIDS AND A BIT OF BRIDGE REPAIR WORK



1 Head up from the place where you start and go up the left side of the map towards the cavalry troops, clearing enemies as you go. When you reach the cavalry they'll join you and ask you to rescue their leader – he's a bit further up by the river.



2 Once you get the druid, he'll automatically start healing your troops. Now, head towards the village on the right. It's a good idea at this point to assign hotkeys to your troops as you'll want to access your auxiliary infantry and archers quickly.



3 Knock down the garrison and then select your auxiliary infantry and right-click on the village and start building a new garrison. Head towards the middle bridge – use your archers to take out troops on the other bank while you repair the bridge.



4 Cavalry can cross the shallow water so send them over the bridge to take out troops while you repair the other bridge and bring your other soldiers across. Clear out the troops and head towards the second village and build a new garrison.

VIETCONG

CD1/DVD Pub: Take 2 **Dev:** Pterodon

If there's one thing *Vietcong* has got it's greenery, tons of the stuff and you'll be glad of it too in this great multiplayer demo, because every tree and bush is a potential hiding place. Play online or via a LAN through three different modes – Capture the Flag, Deathmatch and Protect the Pilot in the large *Stream* map, which can hold up to 32 players. There are also a couple of different units on offer

for both the American and Vietnamese side, plus several weapons including sniper rifles and pistols.

Even in this one map you won't fail to be impressed by the sheer detail of the environment where every rock and fern frond has been lovingly crafted. The sound is also extremely good, from the burble and twitter of jungle creatures, the tingling sound of the water as you crawl on your belly through a stream towards the enemy camp and even the mellow Hendrix-style guitar twangings while you're choosing your game.

And you won't have to wait too long because the servers are already full of players and getting into a game is thankfully a quick and easy process. Once in there, the gameplay is relatively smooth and all you have to worry about is adjusting your eyes, so you can tell the enemy from the jungle.



Protect the pilot from enemy fire.



Learn your skills in the *Neverwinter* prelude, they'll be useful later.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

CD2/DVD Pub: Infogrames **Dev:** Bioware **Reviewed:** Issue 118 (91%)

It might have taken four months for this demo, but it's better late than never and you can find it exclusively on *PC ZONE*'s cover discs. It contains the prelude to the full game where you get called to the city of *Neverwinter* to become part of a militia created to solve the problem of a mysterious and deadly plague, dubbed the wailing death, that's sweeping the city.

You start inside the city keep and your first task is to walk around talking to various characters who'll teach you about

using your inventory, navigating around the maps and trading with shop keepers. There are also areas where you can learn character-specific skills such as sneaking, pick-pocketing and spell casting.

When your training is finished you need to find Lady Aribeth, the paladin protector of the city. Unfortunately your chat is interrupted when invaders teleport into the keep and start offing the locals, and you'll need to put all your skills to the test to get out alive.

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

CD1/DVD Pub: Novalogic **Dev:** Novalogic

Having moved on from voxels long ago, Novalogic's next *Delta Force* title is looking pretty impressive and after the multiplayer demo from a couple of month's ago, we've got an exclusive single-player demo. Mogadishu, Somalia, is the setting and it's your team's task to free the UN hostages that have been kidnapped by the Habr Gadir militia.



Storm the building with guns blazing.

Leading Delta 5-1, you start the mission sitting on the side of an MH-6 chopper with a team mate and Delta 2-1 supporting your unit. As you close in on the target building, there's a riot in the streets below and a couple of enemies with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), so cover the guys with the big guns before allowing your pilot to hover.

Once the helicopter hits the turf, you'll be confronted by more enemies on the ground while your team storm the building with flashbangs and guns blazing. Get to the top of the building with the hostages intact and it's mission complete as you wait for a Ranger unit to come and pick up your team.

In your initial inventory, you'll find a CAR-15 rifle, flashbangs, smoke and frag grenades, a sidearm and the obligatory knife. There are ammo packs dotted



Take out the militia first or you're stuffed.

around the building, so don't feel too bad about emptying a magazine or two before storming the target. You'll also find med

packs in useful places so remember where they are if you need to enter a packed room.

ULTRA ASSAULT

CD1/DVD Pub: Small Rockets **Dev:** Small Rockets

Ultra Assault is a vertically scrolling shooter that will have arcade fans hooked. As well as looking the part, this demo shows off some of the more original elements the team have added to its arcade-inspired formula, including stat power-ups you can collect and use with ship transformations, from swing-wing dual guns to ultra-fast evasion mode.

Unusually for this type of game, the demo also comes with a level editor, which you can use

to create your own devastating armadas to fight against.

What's more, there's also a multiplayer scoring system that you can employ using your Internet connection to prove your old school arcade gaming prowess. Overall, this is one of the most comprehensive demos we've seen for a scrolling shooter and as it's the smallest demo on our discs this month, it's certainly worthy of your hard drive space.



The smart bomb is there to get you out of any tight spots.

MECH WARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES

CD1/DVD Pub: Microsoft **Dev:** Microsoft



The arena starts to get messy when there are just two of you left.

The metal behemoths of *MechWarrior* are back for yet another stint of mechanised gladiatorial combat. As if the prospect of destroying things in a 100-ton exoskeleton wasn't enough, this demo comes with two different types of mission.

The first is a battle in an arena-based map where you and three other mechs pump rocket-propelled death at each other until someone falls over. The second

is a gun-for-hire mission where you and your team of war machines strike several outposts in order to earn cash that lets you get heavier weapons, better armour and extra crew members.

You've got five mechs to play with and you can customise them to your heart's content with an array of weapons and upgrades before unleashing your wrath on the enemy.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE CD/DVD

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD, SHADOW OF MEMORIES AND THE EXCLUSIVE BREED MOVIE

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 132

EVE ONLINE FEATURE

While *Elite* will always have a special place in the hearts of the ZONE team, it looks like Braben's masterpiece might finally be getting some heavy duty competition from Iceland. Yes, far from being known simply for Björk, Vikings and naturally-heated outdoor swimming pools, Iceland is home to CCP Games who have taken it upon themselves to create a massive online universe somewhat similar to *Elite*.

Featuring interviews with the producers, developers and designers of the *Eve* Universe, this Making Of featurette gives a lot to be excited about. Not least because in the opening interview, the art director credits *Elite* as one of the main inspirations for *Eve* and the guiding light for how they want the game to play.

Graphically, it's looking stunning, even next to Westwood's *Space & Beyond* and last month's look at *X2: The Threat*. Will it live up to the developer's high hopes of an online *Elite*? We hope so and given the footage you can see here, they may just pull it off.



The lighting, the ships, space itself all looks stunning.



OTHER DEMOS ON THE DVD

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES, PRIVATE DANCER, AND LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

FOR FULL CONTENTS SEE THE BACK OF THE DVD CASE

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FIGHT CLUB



The people have spoken and they still want to play *Counter-Strike*. If you don't like it, then vote for another game, says **Martin Korda**

FREE-FOR-ALL

**THURSDAY
6 FEB**

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Counter-Strike **OR**
Unreal Tournament 2003
OR *Battlefield 1942*

HALL OF FAME

Earn five mentions and you'll have your name immortalised. Our one star player so far is...

K.I.T

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Lee Cocker	Viper
Phil Clark	Shit Kicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E.
Jamie Malcom	BraveArt

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting is simple. If CS wins the vote, open the *Half-Life* console and type password *pczone* and then press enter. After this type *connect ffa.zonegames.co.uk* and press enter. You will be taken right there. If you experience any problems connecting on the night of the Free-For-All then check our forum at www.pczone.co.uk as we may be running a non-*Counter-Strike* server with different connection details, depending on how the voting goes.



UT2003, Battlefield 1942 or Counter-Strike. You choose.

AFTER SEVERAL weeks of voting, it was a close run thing but our first Free-For-All game voted by you, the fine readers of *PC ZONE*, turned out to be the one we'd been playing all along, *Counter-Strike*. Which just goes to show that all the excellent new online shooters that have recently appeared haven't dislodged CS from its throne.

As ever, competition was tense, and, after months of battling, we have our first member of the *PC ZONE* Hall of Fame. Please give a warm round of applause, cheers of admiration and generally wave in a polite manner to our first star player K.I.T who has now received five mentions on these pages. Good work.

Performances of note this month came from K.I.T (obviously), logix, miz7, VespR, Mas.ter and Bp1Mrcaffaine. So well done to all of you too.

And don't forget to vote for the game you want to play in our February Free-For-All. To register your choice, send an email entitled February Free-For-All to letters@pczone.co.uk and make your choice from *Counter-Strike*, *Unreal Tournament 2003* and *Battlefield 1942*. Make sure you check out the result on our website www.pczone.co.uk on the day of the Free-For-All for results of the voting and any new connection details.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK ON THE DAY OF THE FREE-FOR-ALL TO FIND OUT WHICH GAME WE'LL BE PLAYING. SEND YOUR VOTE TO LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK



PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to play,

go to the multiplayer connection screen and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

PC Zone CS #1 [All Maps] – cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
PC Zone CS #2 [Dusty] – cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
PC Zone CS #3 [Custom Maps] – cs.zonegames.co.uk:27035
PC Zone Natural Selection #1 – ns1.zonegames.co.uk:27020
PC Zone Natural Selection #2 – ns2.zonegames.co.uk:27020
PC Zone RTCW – rtcw.zonegames.co.uk:27960

PC Zone TFC #1 [2fort] – tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27025
PC Zone TFC #2 [Favorites] – tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27035
PC Zone Q3 [Urban Terror TDM] – q3.zonegames.co.uk:27960
PC Zone FreeForAll – ffa.zonegames.co.uk:27015
PC Zone Unreal Tournament – ut.zonegames.co.uk:7777

PASSWORD: **genius**

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL GIVES YOU THE LOWDOWN ON ALL TOMORROW'S LAN PARTIES

Now's a good time to return those Christmas games you've completed and to get an idea of what you should change them for, get to a LAN and start talking to people (or carry on reading *ZONE* – Ed).

■ The first LAN of the year is my very own GGLAN.co.uk and takes place on January 18-19 in East London. To register go to www.gglan.co.uk and while you're there, check out the fabulous prizes on offer. It costs just £20 for two days.

■ Continuing their successful one-day series of LAN parties is the Lanarchy team (www.lanarchy.co.uk). £12 gets you into the LAN on January 18 in London.

■ The following weekend finds the Jolt team at the Bradford Five Flags hotel, where £20 will buy you one of the 100 places. For more information visit www.networkgc.co.uk.

■ If you like pretty scenery, consider visiting the LAN held by www.roweb.co.uk. They will be hiding out in the North New Forest in Wiltshire from January 31 to February 2 – there are 35 spaces, each costing £17.50.

■ The non-superstitious organisers of the www.lanse.co.uk have organised L13 in High Wycombe from January 31 to February 2. It costs £20.

■ February 1 finds a one-day LAN in Fife, Scotland, with 24 spaces available costing a reasonable £10. To be on the list visit www.ouija2k.net.

If you want your LAN party mentioned here, give me two months notice and send beer and bribes to me at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Happy gaming, y'all. Scalper out.

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Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ **HOLDING COURT** Dave Woods



ANTICLIMAX

Why is that more and more game intros are starting to look nothing like the actual game? Take *Neverwinter Nights* for example. The intro starts with a burly fighter stalking through a forest in full cinematic glory. He then gets ambushed by a minotaur and an amazing battle ensues with the hero finally dispatching his grizzly foe with a nifty disembowelling manoeuvre atop an altar.

When the game itself eventually starts we get a poxy 3D/isometric viewpoint that bears no similarity whatsoever to the sizzling intro. It's a total con and leads to nothing but anticlimax and dashed hopes. You wouldn't get that in a film. Look at the Bond films – they always start with a great intro sequence and get even better from there on in. Developers take note: stop building up our hopes with lies and false representation. If a game engine is so damn good, why not impress us with that instead?

Kevin Powell

If the engine's good enough developers will normally use it for the cut-scenes, but



Open your mouth and say 'ahhhh'.

sometimes it doesn't help to convey the story well enough. Some people love full-motion video anyway – Martin Korda won't have a word said against it and he's bigger than you (probably).

ZONE BABES

You cover loads of games, which is good but why can't you combine them with my other pleasure in life, looking at women with no clothes on. Failing that (and I know you're not a top-shelf mag), how about pictures of pretty women in their underclothes, like *Loaded* or *Maxim*? I think that if you introduced a ZONE 'babe of the month' your sales would skyrocket. All I ask for the suggestion is that I get to direct the first photo-shoot.

James Sandwood

James, you're a scary man.

OFFLINE

Reading Phil Wand's Comment last month I found myself nodding vigorously. I used to love playing games online – *Quake III* and *Counter-Strike* mostly – but now it's just a pain. Most servers are full of idiots and I don't know enough people to get a server going. I've reverted back to single-player games – the AI isn't as good as playing other humans but at least they don't spend their time insulting you (with the exception of the *UT 2003* bots). The anonymity of online gaming is the root of the problem and it needs someone to step in and start (dare I say) regulating it. It's sad that people aren't big enough to police themselves but it's just the way of the world.

Chris Pollard

You could always try a LAN party. You might get to meet a few like-minded people who

want to play on a decent server, but if it's single-player shooters you're after watch out for next issue. *Unreal 2* just missed this one but we've got the world exclusive review next month and it's looking damn fine.



Stop the anonymity!

FAIRPLAY #1

So the FairPlay campaign thinks we're being overcharged for games? I wonder if they ever go through the credits in game manuals. I do – I take the time to go through the names of developers, testers, and the rest of the team because these people have gone through hell to produce the work of art I'm going to play. Not only do they deserve my acknowledgement but also the money I pay for their product.

But what if the said work of art is rubbish? That's when PC ZONE reviews and public demos come in handy and let's just say that the product won't be in my hands in the first place. It's not so much about how much we get charged for a game, but whether or not we feel the game is worth our money. FairPlay says that by being charged so much for games, we're being treated as idiots. I firmly believe that we're being idiots if we spend cash on games that we know are not worth our money.

DC

FAIRPLAY #2

I was reading about the FairPlay campaign and I think that their message should be that the



Who says we don't give you gratuitous female nudity?

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new graphics card courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Blaster 4 Titanium 4600 is as good as the name suggests, and sporting the new GeForce 4 chipset, it gives you more bang than a rabbit stuffed with semtex.



"A wholesale boycott is nonsensical and totally counterproductive"

COLIN PARKES ON FAIRPLAY

We want decent games at decent prices for decent people.

majority of games are a rip-off. The brilliantly crafted titles, which make up the minority, are an absolute bargain. *Morrowind*, *Mafia*, *Soldier Of Fortune 2*, *NOLF2*, *Medal Of Honor* and *GTA III* are brilliant. Is FairPlay really suggesting games such as these represent poor value for money?

Price cuts across the board would result in a general lowering of standards and developers would simply cut staff and hours in an attempt to keep profits steady. If FairPlay could persuade a significant minority to buy only the best titles on the market, they would ensure the majority of the worst developers go bust pretty quickly. If that means buying fewer titles until quality increases then this would surely be the best solution. A wholesale boycott is nonsensical and totally counterproductive.

Colin Parkes

If the FairPlay campaign has succeeded in one thing, it's in bringing the pricing debate into the public arena. The planned boycott hasn't had a big effect, but *PC ZONE* is always up for a ruck, especially if it leads to people questioning the validity of paying over the odds for games.

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE

How dare developers bring out games that last so long? *Morrowind*, which is a game I love, will apparently take me 500 hours plus to finish. Best not mention any of Black Isle's games either. With so many fantastic games out right now, and with lots of brilliant ones on the horizon, how the bloody hell can I play them all? Then there's the retro scene! Arrgh!!! I'm planning on having kids just so somebody will play the games I've missed.

Mel Sharpe



LOTR - short, leaving lots of time for making babies.

Get yourself a copy of *Lord Of The Rings*. You'll be done with it in a few hours leaving you plenty of time for procreation.

SPEARED

My first letter to you and it's a moan, sorry. I've been meaning to impart some little anecdotes for a while, but never quite got around to it, until today.

December 6 was a day I had been waiting for, with great anticipation since your review of *MOHAA: Spearhead*. Eighty-two per cent, that'll do. "Somewhat predictable", "many missions are similar to the original", no

READER REVIEWS

FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT...

We want reviews of the games you love or the ones you hate. Each one should be between 50 and 350 words and come with a score out of 100. The best one wins a game from the current charts. Send your review to the standard Mailbox address (see boxout) and remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

FIFA 2003

PC ZONE ISSUE 122 - SCORE: 80%

We said... "FIFA 2003's immaculate presentation, realistic players and solid gameplay make it the best football game on the PC."



Amazing, absolutely amazing. The only series that seems to get worse with age finally got better - EA has really hit the target this time. One touch passing, pass and move, good old one-twos and truly outstanding goals that are hard to master, this game has got it all. At first I was surprised to see that you'd given it such a high score but now I think that 80 per cent is harsh.

Yes, there are faults with the game, for example defenders sometimes run away from the ball and the shooting sometimes feels a bit random as the ball goes in a different direction to the one you pressed.

On the plus side you get all the up-to-date squads and competitions, and *FIFA 2003* also comes with more than 8,000 players and 16 top leagues. Teams also have their own chants which sound incredible, stadiums that look real and players who look so much like their real-life counterparts it's scary.

It's not a perfect game, nor is it anywhere near *Pro Evolution 2* in terms of gameplay, but it is by far the best footy game on the PC. Buy it. If it's in the game, it's in this game.

Jamie Robertson
VERDICT: 90%

problem. Gimme, gimme, gimme. I purchased it on Saturday, played it for two hours, fantastic. Picked it up again on Sunday, played for four hours and what's this? Credits?

Nooooo, you can't be serious! This has to be one of the shortest games I've ever played. I realise it's an expansion disk, but £20 for six hours of gameplay? That's ridiculous. Why didn't you warn us?

Dave Watkinson

Spearhead is short but it's brilliant while it lasts and if you liked the original **Medal Of Honor** we still think it's an essential purchase.

LIVING IN THE PAST

I've just been reading your preview of *Unreal 2* and I can only hope it's the last time I see Mark Hill bleating on about *Half-Life*. The game is four years old for crying out loud! *Medal Of Honor* and *No One Lives Forever 2* are both recent shooters that



Spearhead might last longer if you just shoot at their knees.

show how much games have moved on since then, but Mr Hill seems to be stuck in the past. Does he wander round the office in his slippers sucking Werther's Originals too?

And he's not the only one. Martin Korda still seems to think *Wing Commander* is the pinnacle of PC gaming and Steve Hill lives in a timewarp where *Sensible Soccer* is still

worth playing. I can just about put up with the nostalgia of Emulation Zone and Retro Zone, but as the brilliant 101 Games Of 2003 feature clearly showed, the future is much more exciting than the past.

Nick Carraway

The future might be exciting but you can learn a lot from the past... Like the fact that **Mr Do** is one of the best arcade games of all time.



The best game ever?

RELOAD

Perhaps you could explain why so many developers keep releasing games as 'sequels' that are nothing more than rehashes of the same old game. CDV did it with *Sudden Strike 2*. *Combat Mission 2*, according to your review, is the same as *Combat Mission 1*, *SimCity 4* looks like being *SimCity 3* with a facelift and *Doom III* will just be just more run, shoot, die, repeat à la *Quake*. Isn't it about time we actually got something bigger, better and different (or at least improved) for a sequel.

Rant mode: off

Fergus Stevens

Is it any different in the world of films? Is *Die Hard 2* a radically different concept to the original? At least game sequels are generally better than their predecessors – all the games you mentioned above might just be 'remixes' but they look gorgeous and play a lot better than the originals. [KZ]

BURN HOLLYWOOD BURN



Everyone keeps going on about how games should be more like films – narrative, dramatic tension, good editing and all that – but I've recently spotted a worrying trend going in the other direction. Namely that films are becoming more like games, and not in a good way. Example: I've just seen the latest Bond film, *Die Another Day*. Try Another Play, more like.

What happened? Where was the tight story and careful, intelligent plotting that we'd finally started to see creep back into the franchise after so many wasted Roger Moore years? Instead it just felt like one big videogame, FPS level after FPS level with a couple of badly-acted cut scenes thrown in to separate them. Much like *Nightfire* in fact. You could almost see the producers saying to themselves, "This bit'll look good in the game" as they wrote it. Wouldn't have happened with Connery, I can tell you.

Same with the so-called Bond rival xXx. Just one long, tedious FPS level after another with added skateboarding thrown in for good measure. And that goes for *Spider-Man*, *Star Wars II* (and I), *Battle Royale*, *The Scorpion King*, *Rollerball* (the remake), *Minority Report* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* too. OK, maybe not the last one. But pretty much any big-budget release in the last two or three years. I fear for *The Matrix* sequels, honestly.

It's all our fault I suppose. We continue to buy third-rate muck, masquerading as triple-A franchise games, instead of reading reviews in *PC ZONE* and paying attention, so naturally the bigwigs in Hollywood assume that this is what we, the kids of today, want to see more of. So the films are messed around with to fit our market profile. Never mind games influencing the snipers and serial killers of this world. The real damage is being done because games are influencing the powers in movie land. Something should be done.

Richard Bennett

You had us right up to the point where you slagged off *Battle Royale*. What's wrong with you man, the film's genius? And if you want to read more about the insidious relationship between games and films, check out our feature on page 30.

READER REVIEWS

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – SPEARHEAD
ISSUE 123 – SCORE: 82%

We said... "The sad thing is that had the developers had the time or the inclination to spend time searching for more creative and original ideas, **Spearhead** could have been the best add-on of all time."

Medal Of Honor is my favourite game of all time and when I heard they were working on an add-on pack I started counting down the days to release straight away. I got it as soon as it came out, took it home, installed it and finished it within a day. Was I disappointed? Yes, because I enjoyed it so much that I wanted it to carry on forever, and no, as it was still fantastic fun while it lasted.

Spearhead looks brilliant and it retains the atmosphere of World War II, something no other shooter has ever managed before or since (*Return To Castle Wolfenstein*? Don't make me laugh.) There are loads of new weapons (handheld and mounted) and a variety of locations to shoot your way through. The AI is solid if a bit predictable and overall the experience is slightly better than the original.

Yes, it's too short but I'd rather pay for quality than a second-rate shooter that takes longer to complete but isn't fit to polish *Medal Of Honor*'s boots. If you liked *Medal Of Honor* you have to buy this, just for the sake of completing the MoH universe. Just don't expect it to last a whole weekend...

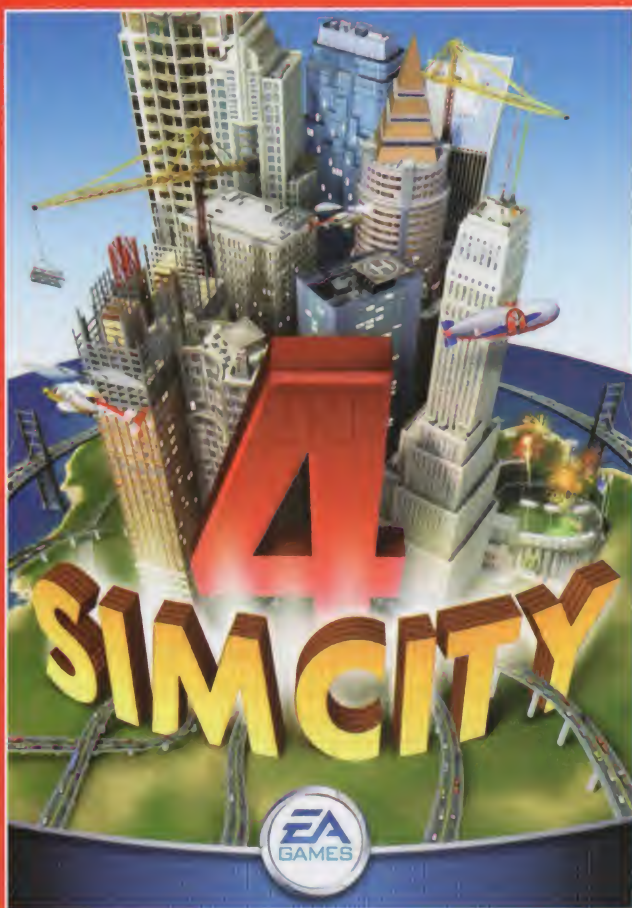
Stuart Bond

VERDICT: 88%



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THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

MEDAL OF HONOR



It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of topping *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

The best single-player shooter only makes number two in the A-List, just losing out to *Medal of Honor*'s multiplayer mode. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.

PUB Infogrames DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 122



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a *PC ZONE* Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 115



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game covering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 118



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 110



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must have for any online shooter fan.

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121



MAX PAYNE

It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.

PUB Take 2 DEV Remedy

PCZ ISSUE 107

STRATEGY

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



WARRIOR KINGS

A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.

PUB Microids DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 114



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV DEV GSC Gameworld

PCZ ISSUE 101



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-er-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb and, as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON DEV Bitmap Brothers

PCZ ISSUE 101



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWood DEV Nival Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 112

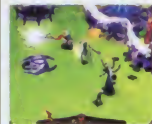


WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 119

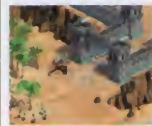


BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Liquid Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 111



AGE OF EMPIRES II: GOLD EDITION

It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *Age of Empires II* the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single and multiplayer campaigns. A great RTS.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 84



SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with classic RTS gameplay in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.

PUB CDV DEV Fireglow

PCZ ISSUE 96

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers. Get in.

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm

PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Bethesda Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Infogrames DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorching of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio

PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 96



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios

PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and bearded of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



ARX FATALIS

This is a graphically beautifully role-playing game with more than a few hints of *Ultima Underworld*. Its hugely detailed and realistic environment made this a PC ZONE Essential.

PUB VU Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

GRIM FANDANGO



If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. The comic interaction between Manny and Glottis is a high watermark for scripting in games, while sublime graphics and laugh-out-loud humour ensure it's at the top of its genre. A word of warning though: it's bloody hard and if your mind doesn't work laterally you'll be playing it until the day you die.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 71



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Infogrames DEV Perfect Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 79



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks

PCZ ISSUE 121



PRISONER OF WAR

One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.

PUB Codemasters DEV Wide Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superbly realistic AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.

PUB Eidos DEV IO

PCZ ISSUE 121



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

PUB Codemasters DEV Rebel Act Studios

PCZ ISSUE 98



PROJECT EDEN

Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.

PUB Eidos DEV Core Design

PCZ ISSUE 107



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 84



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

One of the hardest things to do in a game is to make your audience laugh with you rather than at you, and *Escape From Monkey Island* is undoubtedly one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in recent years.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 98

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Infogrames DEV Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111

THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87

CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70

SIMCITY 3000

Ten years on, the offspring of the original building game *SimCity* still remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.

PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 74

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay over 50 missions, spanning seven historical campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll also have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

Design and build your own theme park and then pack it full of the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up, while trying to keep the cash and the punters coming in. From rickety wooden dippers to *Nemesis*-style, white-knuckle gumers, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.

PUB Infogrames DEV Chris Sawyer
PCZ ISSUE 75

MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.

PUB Infogrames DEV Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 110

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision DEV Activision
PCZ ISSUE 98

ONLINE

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of four expansion packs. The latest, *Planes Of Power* (see page 72 for our full review), provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Verant
PCZ ISSUE 117

NEW ENTRY NEOCRON

A much smaller world than the epic *EverQuest*, but there's a lot crammed into this *Matrix* meets *Blade Runner*-style MMORPG. The atmosphere is fresh, exciting and extremely engrossing. We see big things ahead for *Neocron*.

PUB CDV DEV Reaktor
PCZ ISSUE 124

ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMORPG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 114

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

With some of the best graphics seen in an MMORPG, *Dark Age Of Camelot* creates an atmospheric, engaging and open-ended world. The scale of battles alone should ensure it remains popular for quite a while.

PUB Koch Media DEV Mythic Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 116

ASHERON'S CALL

You can now find the full game of *Asheron's Call* included in the latest expansion pack *Dark Majesty* at a very generous price. The newest updates also include customisable housing and plenty of new quests.

PUB Microsoft DEV Turbine
PCZ ISSUE 111

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.

PUB Take 2 DEV Rockstar
PCZ ISSUE 117

GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Infogrames DEV Simergy
PCZ ISSUE 119

COLIN MCRAE 2.0

This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cars handle beautifully. So if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters
PCZ ISSUE 110

CRAZY TAXI

One of the best arcade conversions to the PC that we've seen for a long time. *Crazy Taxi* is a bright, colourful and in-ye-face driving experience that's built on solid arcade values and good old fashioned insanity.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite
PCZ ISSUE 119

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a better, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

PUB Microsoft DEV Angel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2 STURMOVIK



Combining incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the flight stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** 1C: Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 110

MS FLIGHT SIM 2002

With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** BAO

PCZ ISSUE 111

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103

FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Microprose

PCZ ISSUE 72

B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Wayward Simulations

PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ 3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

GHOST RECON

A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Red Storm Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 110

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Software

PCZ ISSUE 115

HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios

PCZ ISSUE 95

◀ ALL-TIME CLASSICS ▶

VETERAN GAMES JOURNO WARREN CHRISTMAS CHOOSES TEN TITLES CLOSE TO HIS HEART



PAC-MAN (ARCADE)

It was great being a kid during the golden age of arcade games. My parents used to run pubs, and when engineers came at weekends I'd always be hassling for free credits – 99 for *Asteroids* on one long and memorable Saturday. *Pac-Man* was my fave though, to the extent that I memorised all the patterns. Truly a wasted youth.

MANIC MINER (SPECTRUM)

This was, I think, the first Spectrum game I ever saw. I adored it at the time but, having played it recently on an emulator, it's hard to remember why exactly. I could fill this entire list with brilliant Speccy games as I played absolutely hundreds of them – most, admittedly, copied on my sister's Amstrad double-deck Hi-Fi.

SUPER HANG ON (ARCADE)

As a console game it never held much appeal, but Sega's motorbike sim (the cabinet with handlebars, not the gimmicky sit-on-a-bike version) was my favourite at the local arcade during my teenage years. Only one guy in my hometown was better at it than me. Tragically, and somewhat ironically, he died in a motorcycle accident.

KICK OFF 2 (AMIGA)

I bought an Amiga just so I could play *Kick Off 2* (the PC version was the most disappointing game I've ever bought, bar none). Years later I bought a SNES just to play *ISS* and, if I didn't already own one, I'd buy a PlayStation 2 just to play *Pro Evolution Soccer 2*. Fact: brilliant footy games sell consoles.

NHL HOCKEY (MEGA DRIVE)

I had zero interest in American sports until I bought this and the equally brilliant *NFL*. I bought several versions over the years but, even in the days of the Mega Drive, the more realistic and complicated the games got, the less fun they became. In fact, I've never really forgiven EA for taking the fighting out of *NHL*.

GEOFF CRAMMOND'S GRAND PRIX (PC)

I loved *Indy 500*, the first classic driving game on PC, but *Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix* really was the business. Four of us used to regularly cram into my bedroom for multiplayer sessions – a bit of a lottery as you'd take turns during the race, with the computer filling in when you weren't at the 'wheel'. Bless.

DOOM (PC)

The game that changed everything. I was one of the first people in the UK to play it and, even though the alpha version I was sent didn't have sound, the combination of gore, violence and eerie lighting was truly mind-blowing. Lunchtimes at work were never the same again. And then, of course, there was *Quake*...

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2 (PC)

I genuinely hate this game for all the days – and nights – it stole from me. I only kicked the habit when I felt I'd taken Brighton & Hove Albion as far as they could go (back-to-back European championships). I played *CM3* for a week for review purposes but have no intention of going anywhere near the lethally addictive series ever again.

COMMAND & CONQUER (PC)

The first classic real-time strategy game, and boy did I bloody love it. I finished every mission of *C&C* and its sequel *Red Alert*, including all the add-on packs, I played it loads online against Yanks. The toughest mission of all? Disguising from my employers the very serious RSI problem I developed from playing it too much. No joke.

VIRTUA TENNIS (DREAMCAST)

All sports game developers should use this as a blueprint. The two-button shot system is so simple that even your Gran could play it and yet, through timing and positioning, you have total ball control. Just like early classics it's all about skill. I played it every day for more than a year – and I don't even like tennis.

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RETRO ZONE

YOUR REGULAR DOSE OF GAMING NOSTALGIA

"An adventure game where you couldn't carry any objects, or even manipulate them the traditional way"

But the wisdom of the Elders may not be questioned.

That is the final Rule of Membership.



"OK, that's fine with me. I'll take a year's gold membership please."

RETRO ZONE

MAY

1990

Stop! Richie Shoemaker strikes a pose in his highly fashionable MC Hammer pants!

LOOM

The mills are alive with the sound of magic

THEY DON'T weave 'em like this anymore, but way back in the early 1990s, LucasArts (then LucasFilm Games) wasn't able to churn out interactive adverts for its films, having sold the lucrative *Star Wars* licence to the now defunct Broderbund. Instead the San

Francisco codeshop had to rely on its own original ideas, and they didn't come any more unique than *Loom*, an adventure game where you couldn't carry any objects, or even manipulate them the traditional way using things like hands and such.

You played a character called Bobbin Threadbare, a young spellcaster tasked with saving the world of Loom and its Council of Elders, who had all been turned into swans. To interact you had to master your distaff (wand), casting spells by memorising musical notes.

A bizarre mixture for sure, but thanks to an accompanying audio story and a strong narrative, the game worked beautifully. Unfortunately, as it had little in the way of object manipulation, the game was a tad easy and could be completed in a couple of hours.



On the harder levels you had to work out the notes for spells by ear.



Bobbin's home by the sea would fetch a handsome price these days.

THE BEST OF THE REST



ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS

(Amiga/Atari/ST/PC/Spectrum/Amstrad)

A typical save the girl, kill the baddies coin-op conversion, with the titular robots as baddies, a couple of interplanetary SWAT guys as goodies and a beautiful scientist to rescue. Except it wasn't typical – a wonderful '50s B-movie theme and humorous animations made a great action game with a touch of kitsch class.



CODENAME: ICEMAN

(PC)

More adventure shenanigans from Sierra and *Police Quest* author Jim Wallis, much enjoyed by a young Paul Presley, but by very few others. Despite a promising storyline and an added simulation side to the game, the structure was far too rigid to be enjoyable and repetitive settings and obscure puzzles put paid to a sequel.



G-LOC R-360

(Arcade)

G-Loc was a technical marvel, giving players the chance to sit in a speaker-filled bubble and experience jet fighter combat in 360-degree swivel-o-vision. This humble reporter has some vague memories of playing the game after drinking two bottles of Merrydown, thankfully though, the kebab managed to stay down until later that night.



INFESTATION

(Atari ST/Amiga)

Infestation, by the then top UK developer Psygnosis, not only managed to create an eerie and atmospheric first-person 3D game, with an *Aliens*-style spin, but also introduced a couple of novel twists, like being able to remove your helmet indoors, access terminals and use cyanide gas to destroy unhatched eggs. It was slow going, but worthwhile.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM MAY 1990

- Rumours of a 16-bit update for the Amiga and Atari ST of the 8-bit classic *Head Over Heels* were rife, with publisher Ocean admitting an ST version was complete and gathering dust while the marketing suits decided what to do with it.
- Core Design, now famous for *Tomb Raider*, then more famous for *Rick Dangerous*, set itself up as an independent studio, its first game was announced under the working title *Derelect*.
- Self-confessed games addict Jonathan Ross hosted the *Golden Joystick* awards 1990, handing out honours for *Kick Off* (Game Of The Year), *Shadow Of The Beast* (Best Graphics) and *Populous* (Most Original Game).



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

COUNTER-STRIKE

Richie Shoemaker examines the phenomenon of *Counter-Strike*, the freebie add-on that went on to take over the world

PROFILE

Young enough to be turned away from many London clubs, these scamps are the core of the *Counter-Strike* team, backed up with dozens of talented map makers.



NAME Minh Le (AKA 'Gooseman')

ROLE ON COUNTER-STRIKE

Design, coding, models, animation...

NOW DOING Overseeing CS:

Condition Zero while working on (and saying little about) CS2.



NAME Jess Cliffe

ROLE ON COUNTER-STRIKE Design, sound effects and quality control.

NOW DOING Running the *Counter-Strike* website, playing maps and reading hundreds of emails a day.

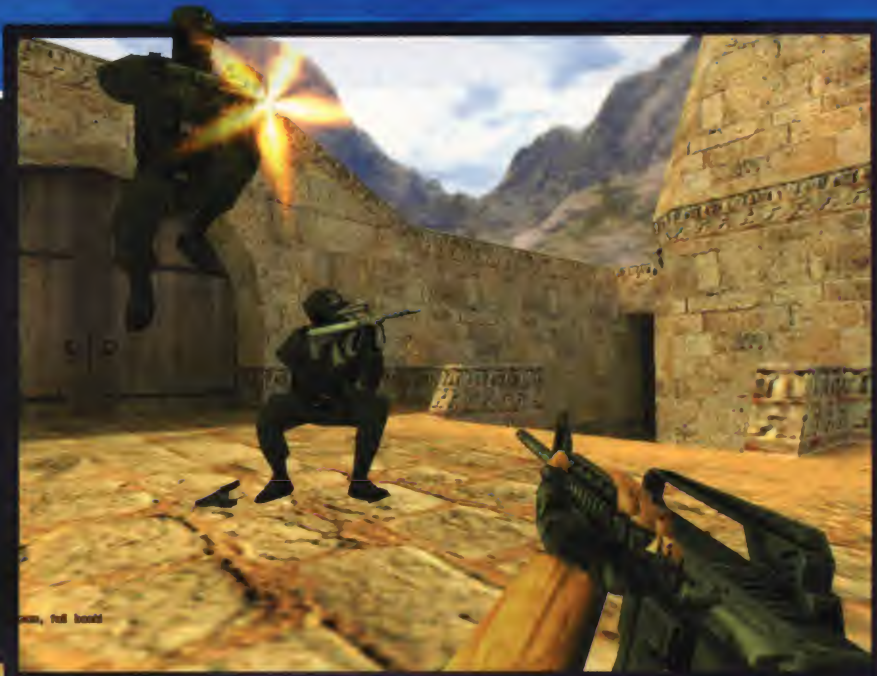
GAME *Counter-Strike*

DEVELOPER The CS Team

RELEASED June 1999 (Beta 1), November 2001 (US retail release)

INFLUENCED *Counter-Strike* has influenced virtually every first-person shooter since its release, certainly in terms of multiplayer design. Not only that, big-name publishers have been falling over themselves to sign up mods ever since, hoping they might find another *Counter-Strike*.





Millions of fans have made *Counter-Strike* the world's most popular online shooter.

PRONE TO crashing, maps that simply wouldn't work, woefully unbalanced gameplay and just a handful of loyal fans fighting for the cause, the early weeks and months of *Counter-Strike*'s troubled life could so easily have been the last, and the game could have ended up, as too many game modifications do, as another promising idea that was never realised.

Today those 100-odd fans number nearly two million die-hard regulars and *Counter-Strike*, three and a half years since the first version was released onto the Net, isn't only the most enduring mod ever made, it's the most popular first-person game in circulation and has been for most of its relatively lengthy existence. Despite its age and against the continuing sabotage from the hundreds of hacks and cheats, even at the unfashionable time of a typical midweek lunch hour here in the UK, close to 80,000 people across the world are playing the game. To put that figure in perspective, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, the latest big-budget shooter, has just 3,000 fighting its cause, a figure matched only by both *Medal Of Honor* and *Quake III Arena*. And just to hammer home the point, of the top 40 games played online

(excluding *EverQuest* and its beardy-weirdy goblin friends) *Counter-Strike* players number more than the other 39 games combined. A leading business magazine recently reported that across the globe 2.4 billion minutes every month are spent in front of *Counter-Strike* (80 per cent of those inside *de_dust*), while 2.9 billion minutes are spent watching *Friends*. Pretty impressive for a game created by an unpaid student.

homemade conversion to beat the original game in the rankings, allowing players to team up together, choose a specialist player class and raid the opposing fort to capture the flag and run it home. But it wasn't enough for Minh Le (aka Gooseman), *Counter-Strike*'s unassuming creator; he wanted something extra: Instead of nail guns and lightning bolts, he wanted to play with something more realistic – MP5 sub-machine guns, Desert

“2.4 billion minutes every month are spent in front of CS, while 2.9 billion minutes are spent watching *Friends*”

IN THE NAVY

The *Counter-Strike* story begins in 1997. Then, it was the original *Quake* that was the FPS of choice, yet after the success of *Doom*'s multiplayer game, people wanted more than a series of deathmatch levels. Thanks to the open-architecture of *Quake*'s code and the availability of tools with which 'bedroom' artists and programmers could tweak id Software's existing code, new gameplay styles and themes were being exploited like never before. *Team Fortress* was the first big

Eagle automatic pistols, sniper rifles and grenades, with missions set not across fantasy-themed forts, or spacestations, but secret military bases, underground bunkers and urban ruins blighted by shellfire. *Navy SEALs* for *Quake* would be the beginning of his odyssey, followed by work on the *Action Quake 2* mod (for *Quake 2*), another realistic-based conversion. With *Navy SEALs 2* already in development with another mod team, Le began work on *Counter-Terrorist Forces* early in January 1999.



COUNTER-STRIKE-A-LIKES

ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Inspired by *Spec Ops*, *Rainbow Six* and even the '80s arcade smash *Green Beret*, *Counter-Strike* wasn't the first real-world military action game by any means, but since its release it has gone on to inspire dozens of similar but distinct game modifications and full release games, one of which was *Global Operations* from CS beta 5 helpers Barking Dog.



Would there be a *Global Operations* without *Counter-Strike*?

Minh Le's sidekick on the project would be Jess Cliffe, who had previously founded a *Jedi Knight* multiplayer website and one for *Action Quake 2*. They met, as most mod developers do, in an IRC chat room and Cliffe was immediately attracted to the idea of a realistic team-focused game based on the *Half-Life* engine and he quickly offered to create and develop the website for the game. Though his role on *Counter-Strike* wasn't a purely technical one, he would provide a foil for Le to bounce ideas off, his first contribution being the change of name to *Counter-Strike*.

MODEL BEHAVIOUR

With a raft of ideas, the only major stumbling block was with *Half-Life* itself. Barely four months old, its creators Valve Software had yet to release the software development kit (SDK); the

give you an example of how much more efficient I was, on *Navy SEALs* it took me about two months to make one weapon model, whereas I would be doing a model in about a week by the time I was working on *Counter-Strike*. And working on those previous two projects gave me the experience necessary to produce graphical content of a standard of quality that wasn't vomit-inducing."

Thanks to his acclaimed work on *Action Quake 2*, Le had already made quite a name for himself on the modding scene and pictures and animations posted on the newly-opened *Counter-Strike* website ensured people took an interest as soon as material appeared online, some visitors even convinced the CS duo were in the employ of Valve, such was the excellence on show.

Over the course of the next three months, as he picked his way through

weapons and rules for the game, they were without maps to play the game on.

"As soon as we needed maps, which was immediately, we had to draft people to help out on the project," remembers Le. "Since we took a fairly lax approach to the map submissions, we were able to maintain control of CS's core game design. In other words, we didn't add any mappers to the core development team. Not initially at least."

Eventually the first beta was released in June 1999, featuring just nine weapons, four maps and one gameplay scenario; hostage rescue. The maps were rushed (unsurprisingly) and generally poor, one didn't even work and the most popular was a direct conversion of a *Team Fortress* map (cs_siege). There were other problems too; though the winning team received a cash prize, the losers left with nothing making the game unbalanced in subsequent rounds, a problem compounded by the fact that dropped weapons disappeared from the map before they could be picked up. The player models were so similar players would inadvertently wipe out their own team and to top it off *Counter-Strike* liked to crash.

But even those frustrated enough to contemplate retiring from active service didn't have to wait long for a fix, as a week later beta 1.1 was ready and friendly fire could be turned off and losing teams could expect a small cash prize for being beaten.

"There were difficulties – mainly programming problems, but I never contemplated giving up. One of the luxuries of working by yourself is that you never have to rely on anyone else to motivate you. There's never a point where you're waiting for a co-developer to finish up a model, animation, texture, or piece of code. That period of waiting can really kill your motivation."



A snail's eye view.

IN DUST WE TRUST

Over the course of the next few months *Counter-Strike* was gradually fixed, improved and expanded. By September (beta 3.0) there were radio commands, new weapons and the now standard wait at the beginning of each round where players are rooted to the spot while they quickly buy weapons and ammo. By now most of the major bugs had been eliminated and the fan base was growing as a result with each new release. By November 1999 beta 4.0 was ready and it would see the biggest update to date, introducing not only a new style of gameplay, the now favourite bomb defuse mission, but also the map that would grow to become the most popular and recognisable piece of real estate in any computer game; de_dust.

As beta 4 was updated, the popularity of the game was almost becoming too much to handle. Emails were flooding in from across the globe, hundreds every day, and the demands of coding and testing were becoming a headache. "Working alone has its perks but if you want to produce a game/mod of a high calibre, you really have to get yourself involved in a team," explains Le. "For the purposes of creating a small mod (which *Counter-Strike* was at one point), you can get away with working alone but these days, it's kinda rare to see, especially if you want to compete with other games/mods."

THE VALVE OPENS

By now Valve Software had caught more than just wind of the mod that had begun outranking its own add-on freebie *Team Fortress Classic* in the popularity stakes. *Counter-Strike* was the reason people were still buying and playing *Half-Life* and Valve, aware that after a year sales should be dropping rather than going ever



Oh, the lunchtimes wasted.

"One of the luxuries of working by yourself is that you never have to rely on anyone else to motivate you"

tools with which anyone contemplating creating new models, weapons and gameplay styles would need. Until they arrived all Cliffe and Le could do was make plans and discuss ideas, while Le got to work creating player and weapon models and animations that he could slip into the game when the SDK arrived. Despite being a self-confessed slow worker, he progressed rapidly.

"Development on *Counter-Strike* was actually easier than on *Navy SEALs* and *Action Quake* because of all the experience I had acquired from working on those two projects," Le recalls. "To

the newly-released *Half-Life* SDK, Le began implementing the ideas that would provide the foundations for what we recognise as *Counter-Strike* today; having specially-trained counter-terrorist forces fighting against paramilitary underground cells, each with a cache of exclusive weapons.

THE WEAKEST LINK

The *Counter-Strike* duo soon realised that although they had a head start with some of the graphics (ripping them out of *Half-Life*'s more realistic levels) and even though Le was storming through the characters,

THE FUTURE: WHERE DO WE GO, GO, GO FROM HERE?

THE STORY'S NOT OVER QUITE YET

With *Counter-Strike* about to go single-player in *Condition Zero* from long-time Valve collaborators Gearbox Software (who are most recently responsible for *James Bond 007: Nightfire* and are now working on *Halo* for the PC), all eyes are turning to *Counter-Strike 2* and what plans Minh has for his next-generation counter-terrorism mod.

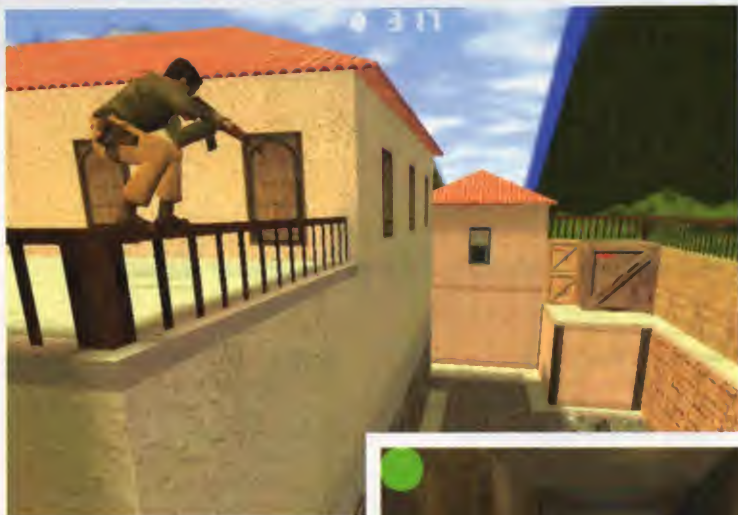
"*Counter-Strike 2* will become a reality and I can only hope it achieves the same success as its predecessor," he responds. "If not, I'll just light my head on fire and go play in traffic."



CS: *Condition Zero* should be assaulting our monitors mid 2003.

upwards, decided to buy into *Counter-Strike*, contracting Canadian developers Barking Dog (now swallowed up by Rockstar Games) to work on the next major update, beta 5.0, improving the interface, adding new maps and weapons and introducing dozens of other improvements that today it would be hard to imagine playing the game without. It was a massive update and despite a few bugs, a great success.

As had increasingly been the case with every new update, beta 5.0 enraged some fans and pleased others. Rumours and reports of Valve's involvement invited some players to accuse the CS team of selling out and with the news in April 2000 that *Counter-Strike* would eventually be

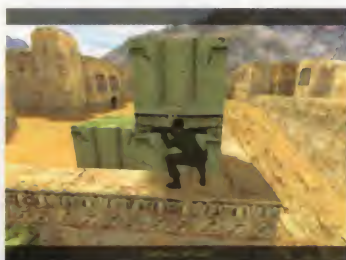


The Korda school of camping.

released to retail stores as a standalone game in its own right, fansites erupted in spontaneous fury. Some despised the idea that they might have to pay, others simply believed with a big name developer holding the reigns – even if it was the mighty Valve – that *Counter-Strike* wouldn't be the game it was intended to be. In actual fact it wasn't Valve that threatened *Counter-Strike*, but *Counter-Strike*'s own unstoppable success.

THAT SINKING FEELING

Beta 6.0, released in March, aside from introducing two new gameplay modes (Assassination and Escape), seemed to herald a new era for *Counter-Strike*, one where it wasn't just counter-terrorists versus terrorists, but battles between those who simply wanted to play and those who wanted to win at any cost. With such massive popularity and a game based on open code, the number of cheats were many and the number of those willing to use them even more so. With each subsequent update release, Valve worked to counter the cheats, releasing new netcode in beta 6.5 and anti-cheat code. It seemed players were



Counter-Strike 1.5 allowed you to view the action from above once you're dead.



Run, little hostage, run...

leaving in droves, sick of being spotted through walls, yet there were countless more players ready to reinforce them.

The final round of beta code was the most curious, Le, now working as part of Valve, had one more feature he wanted in the game.

"Ahhh yes... that sad attempt at vehicles," he muses. "Simply put, the engine just wasn't built for vehicles and it would have required far more programming prowess than I was capable of to make them work. I have not given up on the idea though, as I felt they were a wonderful addition to the gameplay – barring those times that they would spontaneously sink into the ground."

OFFICIAL VERSION

After 17 months of what for any other game would've been a trying period, v1.0 of CS was released in the US as a game in its own right, a first for a total conversion and to the surprise of its creator, sales were good, even if the new animations made combatants look like they were wearing nappies under their fatigues.

"I was initially concerned that people would not buy a product that was available for free," says Le, "but much to



Counter-Strike gets its first play-test.

"The new animations made combatants look like they were wearing nappies"

my surprise there were a lot of people out there willing to support us and also people who didn't have *Half-Life* but wanted to get in on this *Counter-Strike* craze. Initially the fans did call us sell-outs but those cries died down. I guess people realised I develop games better when I'm properly fed and clothed."

Despite its US release, Valve and the CS team continued to support the version that relied on *HL*, and although the standalone game wasn't officially released in Europe, it has sold 1.3 million copies compared to *Half-Life*'s 6 million. It's reported that *Counter-Strike* has earned publisher Sierra US\$40m in revenue.

The *Counter-Strike* assault didn't end there of course, v1.3 brought in built-in real-time voice communication; v1.4 introduced *Half-Life* TV, where players could bring up in-game 3D maps and watch other players at the same time; then earlier this year Valve incorporated its Ricochet technology.

But the *Counter-Strike* story is far from over. Another update is just around the corner, new maps are constantly

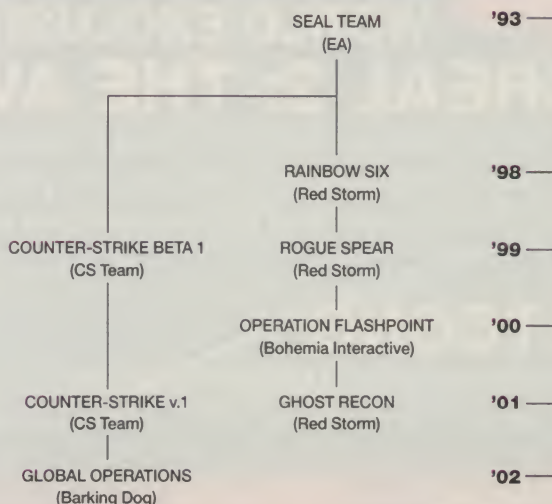
being released and when the single-player *Condition Zero* hits next year, its multiplayer game will fuse with CS. Who knows, in six months time the whole thing could be kicking off all over again. "Initially," says Le, "I was just hoping for a modest size fanbase. Something equivalent to what we had with *Action Quake 2*. When our fanbase grew past *TFC*'s numbers I knew we might be onto something special. I never really knew it was going to be the number one online game, and when it was, I was skeptical about how long it would stay that away. I just never imagined it would be this massive.

"I'm still highly motivated about working on the new CS game. The motivation has differed in the sense that when I was working on the initial version of CS1, I wanted to see if people would enjoy this type of game. Now, having seen the success of CS, I'm motivated by an urge to prove to myself that CS wasn't just a fluke." And after that?

"And for my third product, I will be motivated purely by sex, drugs and booze..." [E]

THE COUNTER-STRIKE ASSAULT

WE FOLLOW THE PATH OF HOW IT ALL BEGAN





COMMENT

Natural aggression is the first victim of videogame violence, reports **Anthony Holden**

PLAYING GAMES will turn you into a slack-jawed, numb-brained psychopath with little or no recognition of the sanctity of life, the pornography of violence, or the evils of hurting small fluffy animals. Such is the message we're receiving on an increasingly regular basis from concerned scientists and health professionals, eager to find a cause for perceived increases in juvenile violence.

The latest theory comes to us from the Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, where researchers have found a link between playing games, cellular damage to the brain and a condition known as DBD or Disruptive Behaviour Disorder. The study found that kids who played violent videogames

displayed decreased activity in the frontal lobe, the area of the brain that controls emotions and impulses, when exposed to "a violent James Bond spy video game". The researchers naturally concluded that their brains had become desensitised, and that they could "no longer understand the real effect of violence."

However, as compelling as this research may be, **PC ZONE** has uncovered startling new evidence that suggests that the very opposite may be true. Incredibly, it seems that spending hours playing violent videogames can turn you into a strangely intelligent yet passive loner with reduced social abilities and an inability to function in the aggressive climate of the modern

workplace. The effect has been linked with a condition known as PNAG, or Pasty Non-Aggressive Geek syndrome. A study undertaken by **PC ZONE** exposed two groups of kids – 'gamers' and 'normals' – to a series of stimuli such as threats of brutal real-life violence and invitations to a Milwall-Cardiff match. Using high-tech measurement devices, it was discovered that the 'gamer' group showed decreased activity in the part of the brain usually associated with contact sports, date rape and college initiation rituals.

"The results suggest that repeated exposure to violent videogames is making the brain overly sensitive to threats of real-life violence, such that the child is no longer willing to defend itself in a manner befitting a human being, supposedly the planet's greatest predator," said Dr Martin Korda, professor of self-defence and weight-training at **PC ZONE's** London faculty.

"This evidence proves that violent games are in fact part of a large-scale *Clockwork Orange*-style plan by the US Government to raise a generation of passive, fearful, socially isolated consumeroids," chipped in Dr Jamie

aggressive, non-violent workers, capable of sitting at a work terminal for extremely long hours, communicating with friends and fellow workers only indirectly, even when the weather outside is sunny and welcoming? Think on that, my friend."

PC ZONE's findings went further, suggesting an attempt to proliferate images of extreme violence through videogames and combine them with some sort of nausea-inducing substance, as occurred in Anthony Burgess' famous novel. No single substance has been isolated, but a study of gamers' diets revealed a preponderance of heavily caffeinated aerated sugar-drinks and fatty convenience foods. Both are commonly known to cause indigestion and heartburn, and in extreme cases, extreme convulsive nausea, just as in the Burgess novel.

"Where's John Carmack from?" continued Dr Sefton, now visibly reddening. "Texas. And where's George Bush from? Uh-huh. Put two and two together, comrade."

Violent videogames have come under plenty of criticism in the past, often linked with schoolyard shootings and Satanic rituals. But this latest evidence gives credence to long-held concern over



Violent games are part of a *Clockwork Orange*-style plan by the US Government.

"Spending hours playing violent videogames can turn you into a strangely intelligent yet passive loner"

Sefton, **PC ZONE's** head of angry rants and conspiracy theories. "Ask yourself, whose interests are served by PNAG? Who would benefit from a culture of anti-

increased apathy and laziness among adolescents, frequently said to not know they're alive. An inquiry into the ratings system is expected to follow. **PCZ**

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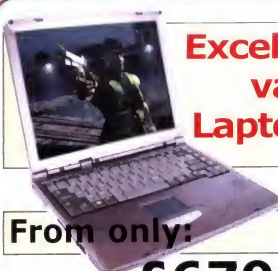
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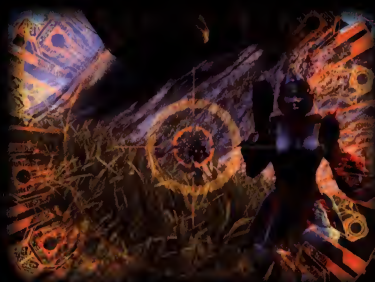
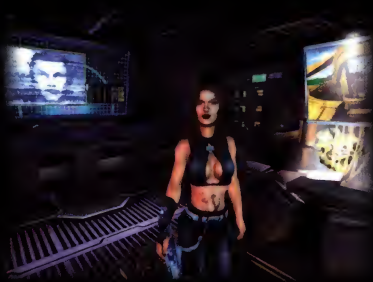


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